



BAROQUE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

LINDA LEE, INC.
JOAN THURSDAY
ALIAS THE LONE WOLF
RED MASQUERADE
THE DARK MIRROR
THE FALSE FACES
SHEEP'S CLOTHING
THE LONE WOLF
THE DAY OF DAYS
NOBODY
THE DESTROYING ANGEL
THE BANDBOX
CYNTHIA-OF-THE-MINUTE
THE FORTUNE HUNTER
NO MAN'S LAND
THE POOL OF FLAME
THE BRONZE BELL
THE BLACK BAG
THE BRASS BOWL
TERENCE O'ROURKE

BAROQUE

A MYSTERY

BY

LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE



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By LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

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DOUBLE DOOM

By LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

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L. J. V.

Darien, 1 January 1923.

BAROQUE

I

BENEATH one of those skies of immaculate aquamarine which New York winters boast a lilac dusk was shading into violet, golden windows were gayly blossoming in the austere façades of Murray Hill, motor-cars were unclosing yellow orbs to guide them through the heaped sierras of the season's first considerable snowfall—and Rodney Manship was buckling into a bleak headwind that, sweeping down Madison Avenue, stung his ears till they burned and his eyes till they wept.

The mist that clouded them was, however, not so blinding as to prevent his discovering at length a legend in letters of gold upon the lightly frosted windows of a corner shop—

BAROQUE BROS.

—and with a grunt of relief he steered for the door and, to the cheery welcome of a bell that tinkled overhead, let himself into an atmosphere stuffy with steam heat and heady with strange scents, musk and myrrh and sandalwood mingling with the indescribable smell of the dust that clings to old, used things.

The shop that occupied all the ground floor of a remodelled mansion was, even so, all too small for the heterogeneous accumulation of objects of virtue more or less problematic which huddled its floor, climbed its walls, and even in part depended by wires and chains from its ceiling: a riot of colour, a jumble of forms; pieces great and small of antique furniture, paintings, tapestries,

stands of armour Oriental as well as Occidental, churchly vestments and secular, squat heathen idols, vases of every shape and sort, glass cases housing confused collections of curious jewellery and trays of unset gems, tiles, mosaics, marbles, bronzes, even ancient books and autograph letters in frames: things that were worthless, things that were priceless, things that were neither, collected and herded into anachronistic and otherwise unnatural promiscuity from every period of history and every clime and corner of the globe.

Here and there odd old lamps, capriciously spaced, shed freakish shadows that enhanced the illusion of chaos beyond repair; and Mr. Manship, peering everywhere for some sign of mortal life, was visited by the conceit that they were less ordinary shadows he beheld than shades of artists dead and gone jealously haunting the deathless works of their creation.

Though he found a smile for the fancy, it was not quite sincere. The tintinnabulation dying out in spasms overhead, only stressed a silence that seemed to hold a curious quality of suspense. And he was fairly startled to see one of the shadows, as if tardily conjured into life by the final flutter of the bell, detach itself from a background of rich gloom and move toward him by a devious way through the clutter.

But a reassuring slap-slap of roomy slippers accompanied its progress; and as it drew nearer the shadow took on the shape and substance of a man of middle-age or more, powerfully made if overstout in physical decadence, with a rubicund countenance and a cavalier carriage—as he might have been Pan turned antiquary, Pan masking in a skull cap set at a rakish angle, a shapeless coat of black mohair, a permanently corrugated waistcoat, and trousers so baggy that one could not have said whether their wearer were stooping or standing erect.

Rings of incalculable value, superb stones in massy settings, bedizened fat and grimy fingers. A common

crocheted necktie, worn and faded, was knotted through a circlet of diamonds. Above rose a head cast in a mould of striking nobility, such as one may see minted on old Roman coins, though its younger beauty had been debased, God knew by what covert indulgences, deep pouches sagged below the bold shrewd eyes, the full lips had gone slack, the complexion was mottled beneath a hoary stubble, and the whole was framed in tufts of grizzled hair like an indignant halo.

The young man civilly saluted: "Mr. Baroque?"

"I am Mr. Baroque," said a resonant voice strongly touched with Italian accent; and Rodney caught a whiff of alcoholic breath—"but so is my brother. Which of us do you wish to see?"

"Mr. Aniello Baroque, I believe."

"I am Liborio Baroque. But I will call my brother Aniello if you will be pleased to state the nature of your business."

"I'm not quite sure I understand it myself," Rodney cautiously admitted, offering his professional card. "I had a note from your brother this morning, asking me to call and advise him on a personal matter."

"A personal matter?" Liborio Baroque repeated thoughtfully. "A personal matter!"

But evidently the cunning eyes studied the eyes of candour only to persuade the Italian that to try to pump Rodney would be waste of time. And he shrugged and led the way to the back of the shop.

Here, in a sort of office contrived by hedging off with desks and show-cases the recess of a bay-window, he unhooked a flexible speaking-tube which hung on one side of a decrepit desk, and blew into its mouthpiece a stiff blast of potent breath. After a moment the mouthpiece responded with an asthmatic whistle, whereupon the Italian confided to it several words in his native tongue. Then he replaced the tube, and with a smile of singular charm addressed himself anew to Rodney.

"My brother will be here in one minute, signor."

"Thank you."

"The day is cold, yes?" Baroque grasped the neck of a decanter on a console nearby. "Perhaps a drop to warm you up—?"

"No, thank you very much."

"A great pity," the Italian commented amiably. "One is averse to drinking alone."

Nevertheless, drink alone he did, and that with gusto; and while he was thus engaged his brother entered by way of a masked door in the rear wall.

The appearance of this gentleman was to Rodney a cause of genuine astonishment, he was so like Liborio Baroque yet so unlike him; physically at least, all that Liborio was not, all that he must have been before an insidious if indefinable corruption of the spirit had sealed the flesh with its ineffaceable stamp. Feature for feature, inch for inch, gesture for gesture, the two were the same yet wierdly not the same; as it might have been Satan had fashioned Liborio in impish caricature of God's handiwork made manifest in Aniello; or as if Aniello were Liborio reflected in some mirror of kindly magic.

Liborio's insinuating smile was in Aniello ingratiating; the hand that clasped Rodney's was firm and cordial, the voice that welcomed him had all the vibrancy of Liborio's but its modulations had none of the subtile suavity which characterized the other.

Rodney made shift rationally to introduce himself; but for the life of him he could not help witlessly looking from brother to brother. And observing this, Aniello frankly laughed.

"It is true," he answered the young man's unspoken thought: "we are much alike in more ways than one, Liborio and I, in more than looks alone."

"A cross which each bears with due humility," Liborio interposed with affected urbanity.

"Still, it is not so strange, seeing we are twins."

"Really?"

"Born in the same hour—"

"As we shall die," Liborio intoned in a voice like a tolling bell.

Aniello lifted an indulgent eyebrow.

"But if you will be good enough to come to my study, Mr. Manship, we can discuss our business without fear of being interrupted by casual customers."

"Or your dearly beloved brother," Liborio amended.

"Certainly, Mr. Baroque."

"Barocco, if you don't mind," Aniello corrected pleasantly. And at this Liborio uttered a short, derisive laugh. "It's true, the firm style is Baroque, but only because we found your Anglo-Saxon tongues had trouble pronouncing the family name we brought from Italy, Barocco; which, as you of course know, is Italian for 'baroque.'"

"Meaning," Liborio volunteered—"if one may trust your English lexicons—'*odd, fantastic, bizarre, grotesque, in corrupt taste.*' Ah, well! who knows? If it comes to that, who cares? Let Aniello remain Barocco, if it pleases him: me, I am well content to be Baroque!"

II

BY way of an exceptionally stout door of steel plates fitted with a massive lock and bolts, Aniello Barocco ushered young Mr. Manship into the entrance-hall of another house altogether, a dwelling of modern type which abutted upon the rear of the premises occupied by the antique shop.

This hall, purely Italian in character with its floor of black and white tiles, its ceiling beamed and its walls panelled in hand-wrought oak, was furnished simply but charmingly with substantial old Italian pieces. Through the plate glass of a great front door with an iron grille, a glimpse was visible of the snow-bound crosstown street.

Through it, too, in that same instant, a blast of icy air entered with a young man in a beautiful fur-lined coat and an ugly temper; a singularly handsome boy, unmistakably Italian with his oval face, regular features and olive colouring; but for traces of effeminacy in both face and body—he was as slender and graceful as an adolescent girl—precisely what Aniello must have been at his age.

Stopping short at sight of Barocco and his guest, the young man favoured them with a truculent scowl but no other sign of recognition, until Aniello addressed him in phrases eloquent of patience, affection and sadness, which, since they were couched in Italian, Rodney could not understand. Neither was the reply more intelligible, though no one could have been mistaken about the angry defiance with which it was delivered.

Then the cub shrugged out of his overcoat, tossed it with his hat and stick upon a table, and ran lightly up the stairs. And Barocco showed Rodney a twisted grimace of apology.

"My son, Angelo," he said simply; but his tone was despondent.

A wave of a gracious hand invited Rodney to the stairs; and on the second floor Aniello led the way into the library, made his guest comfortable in a roomy chair, offered him cigarettes, and to insure their privacy closed the folding-doors that communicated with the drawing-room.

"You are a younger man than I expected, Mr. Manship," he smilingly said, seating himself at his desk. "Your father—?"

"He died shortly after I was admitted to the Bar," Rodney explained. "I looked up our records, when I got your note, and found that father had handled a case for you several years ago."

"I am sorry, Mr. Manship. . . . But as to the business I wished to discuss with you, it is simple, merely the making of my will—a duty in which I have been inexcusably negligent."

"But in good company, sir. Most men put off making their wills till it's too late; the few who remember in time do so, as a rule, only in the shadow of death. But I'm happy to think such is not the case—"

"No," Barocco equably agreed. "As for my health, I must confess it is excellent. Still, one grows conscious that one is getting on. My son is twenty and already, he assures me, quite able to take care of himself without advice. That makes one think."

"You have no other children?" Rodney perfunctorily enquired.

"One other only, Angelo's twin sister, Francesca."

"Truly?"

"You find that surprising?"

"Why! I presume it isn't, really; still, I don't recall ever hearing of a father, himself a twin, having twin children."

"And yet—Heaven knows why!—in the history of my

family twins have been almost a commonplace occurrence."

"I should think that must be rather jolly, twins must be company for each other."

"Such is the general attitude, I know. But with us it is otherwise; we Barocci are a superstitious people, and the family tradition runs that of twins always one will turn out to be 'baroque.' Regard, for example, my own children: Francesca is better than gold—while Angelo—!"

Barocco lifted eloquent eyes ceiling-wards, and sighed from his heart. "The boy is out of hand already. His mother, who died two years ago, had some little influence with him; but for me he cares nothing—nothing! That, indeed, is what made me think of my will; for I know it would not be well for Angelo to have too much money to play fast and loose with. But if you will be amiable enough to take a few notes, I will tell you what I have in mind."

One of the drawers of his desk yielded a steel despatch-box and this in turn a number of documents, birth and marriage certificates, naturalization papers, and the like, which, with Barocco's statements in general, enabled Rodney to piece together a simple chapter of family history.

The Barocci, he learned, had for generations been folk of consequence in Naples, where Aniello and Liborio had been born in 1864. In '84 the brothers had emigrated to America somewhat suddenly and (this was surmised, more from what Aniello didn't say than from what he did) in consequence of some escapade of Liborio's. Settling in New York, they had established their present business, and had prospered.

Liborio had remained single, but in '95 Aniello had married Mary Louise Oliphant, an Englishwoman of good family. The twins Francesca and Angelo were born in 1900. Seventeen years later their mother died.

Figures were lacking, but the several properties and

interests which Aniello had to bequeath made up a considerable estate. Setting aside legacies to old servants, and a trust fund to be established to pay Angelo a modest annuity, everything was to go to the girl Francesca.

"There," Barocco rounded off the conference, "I think you have it all. But wait: have I perhaps overlooked somebody?"

"Your brother?" Rodney suggested.

"Liborio? No: I have not forgotten him. I will tell you something which you will think strange, Mr. Man-ship—it would be idle to leave anything to Liborio for the reason that he will not survive me."

Rodney opened his eyes.

"How can you be sure of that?"

"I know what I know. So does Liborio. You heard him, I believe."

"Why! I do recall his saying something or other—"

Here Barocco interrupted sharply, lifting a hand to enjoin silence while he turned an attentive ear and troubled eyes toward the folding-doors; and Rodney on his own part appreciated that he had for some minutes been subconsciously sensible of a rumour of voices in the drawing-room, a murmur in monotones which, of a sudden, had risen to a keen pitch of passion—a man's voice and a woman's beating against each other in bitter disputation.

With a worried hiss indrawn between shut teeth, Barocco thrust back his chair. Simultaneously, in the room beyond, a woman cried out loudly, but seemingly in anger more than in fear, while the voice of the man fell an octave to the inarticulate snarl of a beast enraged.

As ugly a sound as Rodney had ever heard from human lips, that snarl brought him up in quick alarm. Even so, and for all his years, Aniello proved the quicker, and had thrown open the doors before the younger man was fairly out of his chair. But Rodney came abreast of him as he stood transfixed by the scene thus disclosed.

Against the glow of a lamp in the farthest corner of the room two figures stood and swayed en silhouette, locked in combat. The light was insufficient, only by their dress was it possible to distinguish that they were man and woman; for the latter wore a toque of the mode and a voluminous wrap of fur.

The man was evidently the aggressor; that first glimpse showed him viciously forcing the fight, all the efforts of the woman being solely to free her throat from his strangling hands. And in this she was abruptly successful, with an amazing display of strength and spirit breaking his grasp, and at one and the same time flinging him off and tripping him. He went down in a sprawl, but before his back touched the floor with the agility of a cat rebounded and flew back to the attack.

A blow from the shoulder that would have done credit to a professional pugilist stopped this new onslaught. In mid-stride the man checked, his head flying back to the noise of a stinging crack, in the flutter of an eyelash topped and collapsed upon himself, then lay still.

The woman fell back a pace or two, nursing bruised knuckles and watching the shape on the floor with dilate eyes in a face bleached by excitement.

And as the light from the library revealed her features, though he had never seen her before, Rodney knew her for Francesca Barocco.

He could hardly be mistaken, nobody could so closely resemble the boy who had passed him in the entrance-hall but that boy's twin sister.

As for Angelo, it was he who lay motionless at Francesca's feet.

III

FROM first to last what they saw of the quarrel passed off so swiftly that neither of the men in the doorway could have lifted hand to interfere even had surprise not held them spellbound.

The felling of Angelo made an end to that. He had hardly dropped before Barocco went into action, making for his daughter with long strides, carving the air with wild gesticulations, haranguing her in accents aggrieved.

Either the girl didn't hear or she didn't care to hear, Aniello's tirade assailed her as ineffectually at first as a torrent dashes against a rock that blocks its channel.

At length, however, she roused and looked round with such a look as one may wear on waking from a vivid dream. And after another moment the sense of her father's expostulations came home to her, her eyes lost their dazed fixity, her features their tense immobility, and returning colour began to tint the warm olive pallor of her cheeks.

"But you saw!" she cut in impatiently—"you saw what he was doing—what he was trying to do—though I was beforehand with him there, thank God! Why shouldn't I have struck back, defended myself?"

Her voice was of contralto quality, her English exquisitely inflected; while the readiness with which she used that tongue suggested that it was a choice as instinctive with her as Italian had been with her father. It served, moreover, to divert Barocco's protests into English.

"But why? You must have said something to provoke him—!"

"Provoke him!" Francesca laughed contemptuously. "Of course I did. It always provokes Angelo to be found out—doesn't it?"

"What, then, did you say?"

The girl lifted to Barocco's face a gaze grave with a significance illegible to Rodney.

"Merely that I knew what he had done last night—what you have so long feared."

Barocco winced, horror echoed in his voice: "He has become novice, he has taken the vows?"

The girl inclined her head.

"Madonna mia! You shall not say such things unless you are sure! How could you know—?"

"Is there anything *he* can keep hidden from me that I care to know? Or must you have more proof than this, that Angelo swore to kill me before I could tell you? You saw him try."

"Misericordia! your own brother, my own son!"

"Are you still pitying him?"

"But consider the sadness, the pity of it, that you two, born of one mother in the same hour—!"

"It was not I who forgot that first."

"*Look out!*"

The warning was Rodney's, who to this point had followed the dialogue with a natural interest so entire as to render him as unmindful of Angelo as they had been.

But all at once he had become aware that the boy was stealthily pulling himself together and preparing to rise. And one glimpse of that face with its staring eyes fixed upon Francesca, its features distorted in a grimace of mortal hatred, had been enough.

Rodney's cry and the spring with which Angelo found his feet were simultaneous; but so quick was the latter that not one of the others had begun to grasp what was towards when the boy whipped out a pistol and fired point-blank at his sister.

Haste alone could have betrayed his hand at that little

distance. The report reverberated shockingly from wall to wall and back again, across the room an inoffensive vase upon a pedestal dissolved in shards—but Francesca stood untouched.

Galvanized, Barocco in a bound came between the two, and in accents alternately imperative and imploring adjured and enjoined Angelo to put away his weapon. But the sole response he got was a flourish of the pistol with a curt injunction to stand aside and be quick about it or take the consequences.

Here Rodney provided a diversion by moving toward Angelo. A sign with the pistol and a murderous look stopped him, and he waited, only edging closer with almost imperceptible footwork, while Barocco, standing unmoved between death and his daughter, levelled an admonitory hand and in a tone singularly tragic uttered perhaps a dozen words in Italian.

On the last word his arm fell, he dropped his chin upon his chest and, to the unbounded amazement of Rodney, deliberately stepped aside and left the girl exposed.

Even more confounding was the upshot of this manœuvre. Watching Angelo narrowly, weighing the chances of losing his life in a sudden flank attack, Rodney saw consternation replace madness in the boy's eyes and passion ebb swiftly from his countenance, leaving it a blanched field for the play of enervating emotions—doubt, disquietude, dread, all culminating in a seizure of panic terror.

Rodney closed in quickly; but the hands that laid hold of the boy worked his will against no resistance, the weapon was yielded him with a readiness which suggested that Angelo would have dropped it of his own accord in another instant—as if that terror which had seized upon his mind had rendered him indifferent to if not actually unaware of Rodney's interference.

Disarmed, Angelo gave a broken cry, low and incoherent, and lifting a tremulous hand like a sign of exor-

cism between him and his sister, ran stumbling from the room.

Throwing his daughter a word in haste, Barocco followed.

Alone with the girl, Rodney stood eyeing her dubiously, keen to question her, hindered by all manner of reasonable misgivings. Nothing encouraged him in the regard which she bent upon him when the bang of the hall door left her free to regain her accustomed composure.

If she had ever lost it!

No want of poise was perceptible. To the contrary, she appeared to be, no doubt was, far more at ease and in command of herself than he. Certainly nobody could have guessed she had recently fought for her life there in that quiet drawing-room, where only the shattered vase and the acrid smell of powder smoke was left to tell of the peril she had weathered.

But how the deuce *had* she weathered it? What sorcerous formula had Aniello Barocco pronounced to bring that mad young ruffian to his senses?

Rodney bowed, smilingly proffered the pistol.

"Perhaps you'd be good enough to take charge of this, Miss Barocco. I'd be glad to see it in safe hands."

"Thank you." The girl coolly took the weapon and put it away in a pocket of her wrap. Her self-possession remained entire, but she permitted perplexity to knit a faint pucker between eyebrows delicately arched.

"Please!" she directly demanded—"who are you?"

"Pardon: my name is Rodney Manship. Your father called me in for a consultation. You see, I'm a lawyer."

Dismay or something nearly resembling it widened the girl's eyes, she gasped throatily, "A lawyer!" and stepping close to Rodney placed an insistent hand upon his sleeve.

"To make his will!"

It was a statement more than an enquiry, and one to which Rodney had no business to say yes or no. And

as he hesitated, seeking a serviceably ambiguous reply, the pressure of her fingers grew more pleading.

"But you won't tell Angelo, you won't let him know—!"

"Rest assured, Miss Barocco, I won't betray a client's confidence."

"But Angelo—promise he shan't find out—!"

"He shall learn nothing from me."

"If he should, I daren't think what might happen."

"He does seem rather—shall we say temperamental?"

"'Temperamental!'" A laugh short and mirthless mocked the term. "I'll tell you what he is," she gravely offered—"Angelo is a devil."

"From what I've seen, I find that easy to believe."

"Oh! it's true, I know him—as nobody else knows him, *I* know Angelo. Some day, if I am not careful, he'll murder me in one of his rages. He would have done so just now, if he hadn't been afraid."

"He didn't seem afraid to try—"

"No—not till father reminded him that, if he did kill me, he would die himself."

Rodney wasted a moment in a wondering stare. Then—"Oh!" he exclaimed—"I see what you mean. I dare say that is the best argument in support of capital punishment—that fear of the electric chair makes many a would-be killer stop and think."

Francesca shook her head. "That wasn't what frightened Angelo. Fear of the law would never influence him."

"Then—what—in the name of reason did?"

"Why! of course, because we're twins."

The young woman seemed to think she had made everything clear, and betrayed some impatience when Rodney confessed himself still at a loss.

"Don't you know twins always die at the same time?—that one never survives the other by more than a day at most?"

"I am acquainted with the superstition, naturally, but—"

"Call it superstition if you like: *we* know it to be a fatal fact. There have been twins in our family more than once, and always they have died on the same day. So we know that when father dies, my Uncle Liborio will—that when I die, Angelo must."

At this juncture, Barocco with a sombre countenance, returned; and running to him, the girl threw herself into his arms. He held her close, gently patting her shoulder, murmuring ineffective words of reassurance and endearment.

"Well?" she anxiously queried.

Barocco lifted and let fall hands of despair.

"What did he say?"

"He would not listen—took his hat and coat and left the house to go back—to them!"

The girl gave a cry of protest: "Ah, no, no!"

"Where else should he turn when he leaves my roof? We know that he has gone to them—God forgive him!"

"And help us!" Francesca prayed.

IV

THUS it came to pass that Rodney Manship took home that night more to make him thoughtful than his memoranda of the wishes of Aniello Barocco concerning the testamentary parcelling of his property.

And being an utterly normal young man endowed with a normal quantum of human curiosity, he fairly itched with the mystification excited by what he had learned in the house of the Barocci—if more by what he hadn't.

Leaving all else out of account, there was food enough for wonder in that double mystery of consanguinity. How, out of that closest relationships in nature, could two beings have come so unlike in all but the superficial flesh as Aniello with his simple dignity and gentleness and that swashbuckling blade, his twin brother, Liborio? Or that passionate boy with his face of a faun and the cool, contained young person who was his twin sister—with her face of fatality!

The purity of its beauty alone would have made that face memorable, but what rendered it unforgettable was the pensive loveliness of dark eyes sweetly grave and remote, with a look of mystery and melancholy, as though they envisaged unafraid an isolate and tragic destiny—a look of fatality indeed.

One or two women in an age are set apart by that look. They are greatly loved, they suffer greatly. But rarely Life is kind, and love comes last. . . .

Not unnaturally Manship put aside more important matters in favour of the will; and the third evening found him once more in the library with Barocco. But

on this occasion Francesca was not in evidence, and her father found no cause to speak of her until, their conference concluded, Rodney ventured to delay his departure with a discreet amenity.

Miss Barocco was well, he hoped, had suffered no ill effects from the—ah—excitement of the other evening?

“If Francesca were upset by every quarrel she has with Angelo, she would have to spend most of her time recovering. But she is above that. A noble nature, generous and forgiving”—Barocco sighed heavily—“as noble as Angelo is—otherwise. Unhappy boy!”

“I wonder if you’d mind telling just what you said to make him give up that gun without a struggle.”

“I told him not to forget Francesca was his twin sister, that he couldn’t kill her without committing suicide.”

“And he believed that!”

“Why not? He knows my grandfather and his brother, who were twins, died simultaneously; and so did my aunt and her twin sister.”

“Odd! I’d heard the thing talked about, of course, but never imagined anybody took it seriously.”

“There are many odd things in life, Mr. Manship, we must take seriously, the psychic affinity between twins not least among them. Haven’t you noticed how they’re seldom happy out of each other’s sight? It is so with Liborio and me, for example. If you knew us better you’d say our natures had little in common—yet we are inseparable. If I didn’t know where to find Liborio, if I were not sure all was well with him, I should be beside myself. And though Liborio holds me in contempt, because our tastes and ways are not the same, he can’t bear to live apart from me.”

“Astonishing!”

“It’s like that with my children, too. Angelo left us that night meaning never to return; he has stood it out nearly three days, now the necessity to be near his sister

brings him back, nothing else. I have just had a telephone message that he is on his way home."

"And Miss Barocco—has she been unhappy in his absence?"

"Probably not so much as Angelo, but more than she let me see. She has extraordinary strength of character, sublime fortitude of soul. She is capable of suffering greatly, without a murmur—where Angelo would make everybody miserable with his self-pity and complaints. Francesca is more keen mentally, as well, and has other gifts that have been denied her brother. She can read his mind in a measure, but he can never read hers. That's one reason why he resents and hates her so, because he's terrified by her intuitions. Yet he hasn't the strength to stay away."

Rodney made conventional noises of sympathy, but Barocco was inattentive.

"It sums up to this," he said, with his patient smile: "they are like two pearls; but one is perfect and one—baroque."

As Rodney lingered on the doorstep, drawing on his gloves and making up his mind whether to walk home by way of Madison Avenue or Fifth, a venerable ark of a taxicab rocked round the corner and, quaking with senile palsy, drew up at the curb. From it emerged Angelo.

He looked like the very devil. Still clothed as on their first encounter, he might have been sleeping in his garments ever since, so wrinkled were they and out of shape. His eyes were bloodshot and sunken, a three days' beard darkened his chin and jowls, the tremulous hands were chapped red with which he dragged from his pocket a few, wadded bills and selected one for his chauffeur.

His appearance as a whole was, in short, simply shocking, and made one wonder precisely what it was that the partisans of Prohibition imagined they were prohibiting.

Uncertain recognition flickered in the half-glazed eyes that rested on Rodney, nothing more; and Rodney made off unaware of the fact that Angelo had suddenly remembered and was favouring the view of his back with a scowl of pure spite.

V

BECAUSE Aniello Barocco, his will once drawn and executed, seemed to consider the incident closed, Rodney wasted many an hour trying to devise some pretext for reintroducing himself in any easy, natural fashion to the ken of Barocco's daughter. But scruples, diffidence, and over-anxiety so hampered his ingenuity that the upshot was absolute exasperation and only that.

A week, one everlasting week, had been irretrievably lost out of life when events took a turn favourable to his desires, and yet another wintry nightfall brought him again to the residence adjoining the antique shop of Baroque Brothers.

The aged Italian manservant who answered his ring dispassionately averred that Signor Aniello Barocco was not at home.

But Miss Barocco, perhaps—?

Desolatingly it appeared that the signorina likewise was abroad. For all that, there was no knowing when she or her father might not return. If the signor cared to come in and wait . . .

Rodney said that he wouldn't come in, thank you, he'd just step into the shop and have a look round, if the servant would be good enough to let Mr. Barocco know . . .

It was an hour later than the time of his first visit, and that much darker. The warning tinkle of the little bell was like an open sesame to some cavern of enchanted gloom permeated with the exotic warmth and fragrance of Arabian nights; merely to penetrate its portals was to experience a sense of adventuring across

a magic threshold into a realm of wonders where anything but the commonplace was possible.

As had not been the case on that first occasion, there were several customers in evidence, whom the inadequate illumination revealed as vague shades wandering through a labyrinth of shadows. The light of a closely-shaded lamp discovered the portly and florid Liborio at a counter near the door, showing trays of jewellery to the pretty tenant of Russian sables and a pair of sheer silk stockings the hue of silver. Seeing Rodney come in, he cocked a genial eye his way, nodded, and waved a casual hand as who should say: "Make yourself at home, my friend—but wait your turn!"

So for twenty minutes or more Rodney humoured his whim unhindered, prowling and coveting—till unexpectedly an idle turn round a screen of burning cinnabar brought him to the door that communicated with the Barocco home, at the precise instant when it was flung violently open to admit Francesca or her living image.

The face of fatality had so long held first place in his thoughts that it never occurred to Rodney to question the likeness until, hat in hand and heart in mouth, his lively smile was met and chilled by a glare of hostility.

Then seeing how he had been misled, by the very eagerness of his desire as much as by the wretched lighting, he clapped his hat back on his head and, reddening, began to blurt excuses.

"Oh! pardon, Mr. Baroque. I thought—I mean to say—"

"Well—now you see your mistake—what d'you want?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"What are you doing here? What do you want?"

"Why!" Rodney explained with his most winning smile—"I just dropped in to see how unmannerly you could be without provocation. And now you have demonstrated so handsomely, permit me to bid you good day."

He bowed mockingly and swung about.

"One moment!" In a cat-like bound Angelo planted himself in Rodney's way. "If you're waiting to see my father, I'll give him your message—"

"You're too good. Besides, I haven't said I wanted to see your father."

"Well! if you're sticking round in hope of seeing my sister, let me tell you—"

"Your sister will speak for herself, thank you, Angelo."

Cool, amused accents pronounced the interruption; Francesca stood beside them, having come in a moment after Angelo. And the wonder with which Rodney realized anew the warm carnation of her face, aglow from the sharp air and, framed in dark furs, lovelier even than in his dreams, blotted out of mind all the graceful speeches he had prepared against such a meeting as this, by accident prepense. He was able only to stammer feebly when, with a friendly smile, she gave him a gloved hand.

"How do you do, Mr. Manship. You mustn't mind Angelo, he can't help being himself, he's so young—such a child that I never can explain how it happens he's my twin. You wanted to see father? He'll be home directly, I'm sure. Do come in and let me give you tea while you wait."

Utterly discountenanced, his slender, effeminate body quivering, his features nervously working, Angelo made no offer to accompany them, but remained rooted in chagrin, glaring at the doorway through which they disappeared.

The girl's casual and tolerant manner changed, once she and Rodney were alone.

"I'm so sorry, Mr. Manship. Angelo grows more hopeless every day."

"It doesn't matter. I quite understand."

"But—that's just it—you don't, really. I can't explain, either. It's a family secret—the skeleton in our cupboard. And yet I must make you understand somehow,

he's dangerous, actually dangerous. And if I might ask a favour—"

"I can't think of anything you couldn't ask of me!"

"To avoid Angelo as much as possible—"

"I'll do my best, though I doubt if there'll be another occasion."

"Thank you. And now"—Francesca turned to the staircase—"let's have tea. I've been walking, and I'm famished."

The tea service was ready upon a table in a corner of the drawing-room, beneath the standing lamp; and a ring brought a manservant with boiling water.

"But I wonder," Rodney suggested, watching the girl busy herself with the cups—"yes, please, two, and cream—I wonder if you're wise. I mean, about your brother. If you ask me, what you said to him just now—or the way you said it—annoyed him far more than I had."

"Oh! I'm not afraid of Angelo. I can manage him. It's Angelo who is afraid of me, you know. I can say and do what I like—he daren't touch me."

"He forgot that once, he may again."

"No fear," she lightly laughed. "Besides, it's either the attitude I've adopted, or give in to him altogether—and *that's* unthinkable. But," she added, giving Rodney his cup, "let's talk of happier things. Father, for instance. I'm sorry he's late."

"I've got something to tell Mr. Barocco," Rodney ventured. "I don't know that it's important enough—and yet it's strange. I'd like to know what you think, if you don't mind."

"Please—and smoke when you like."

She settled back to listen, a gracious figure posed graciously in the rich lamp-light, with eyes so flatteringly attentive that Rodney had trouble keeping his mind on his tongue.

"Of course," he said, "it may all turn out to be a mare's-nest, but—well!—the other day somebody got

into my rooms by way of the fire-escape, and ransacked my desk. Nothing was stolen, but the lock on the desk was smashed and all my private papers were in disorder."

"How funny!"

"Wait. Last night my offices downtown were burglarized. The thieves jimmied the door, broke open desks, and wrecked the safe. A big risk to run for the sake of their haul—a handful of petty cash and some stamps. The safe is mainly used to store legal papers in. Anything of real value I always put in my safe-deposit vault at the bank. The thieves tore out all those papers, went through file after file, littered the floor with them. We had the deuce of a job sorting them out and checking up to find what was missing—"

"I know."

"*You* know!"

The girl sat up with a gesture of keen distress.

"I've known all day something was wrong, something had happened Angelo didn't want me to know about—he's been keeping out of my way so persistently."

"I'm sorry, Miss Barocco, I didn't mean—I didn't come here to accuse your brother—"

"You haven't. *I* accuse him."

"But there's not the slightest evidence—"

"It's father's will that's missing, isn't it?"

"Yes; that is, the office copy. The original is in safe deposit. I thought your father ought to know; but of course it never entered my head—"

"Oh! I don't say Angelo actually stole it with his own hands. But that he instigated the burglary, when he didn't find what he was looking for in your rooms, I'm morally certain—as sure as I am that at this very minute he's eavesdropping out there in the hall!"

Of a sudden she left her chair and ran toward the doorway, heels clicking on hardwood spaces between the rugs, but half-way halted and threw Rodney a look of sorry satisfaction, the tilt of her head inviting him to listen.

A sound of hurried feet upon the stairs was audible with, a moment later, the slam of the street door. The girl shrugged contemptuously, went to the windows, drew back the draperies, and peered down.

"It would be like Angelo to bang the door, then steal back upstairs to listen. . . . No: there he goes."

Her smile was pitiful as she returned to Rodney.

"You see what it is I must call brother!"

"I'm so sorry, Miss Barocco . . ."

"It can't be helped," she sighed—"it is fate, I presume. Always, they say, one of the twins must be 'baroque.' And what can one do? What can any one do who doesn't know what that young devil has in mind? He keeps away from me, you see, for fear lest I should find him out; for I have a way of finding out his secrets. But now—!"

Her hands described a movement of helplessness.

"What do you fear?"

"Everything. If I dared speak frankly . . . But I must keep the family secrets, I can only tell you this: that now Angelo knows he has been disinherited—"

"Not altogether: he's down for a small annuity."

"The same thing to Angelo. He's a spendthrift and a gambler; merely enough to live on means poverty to him. What little effort he has made, up to this time, to keep up an outward show of decency was inspired not by affection for father, moral compunctions, or any sense of shame, but simply by avarice—because he was afraid of what has happened, that he'd be cut off with a shilling. And now he knows, he'll stop at nothing to make his resentment felt."

"What can he do?"

"If I only knew!" Francesca wrung her hands. "Don't think me hysterical. I'm not—but half-distracted. It's in Angelo's power to bring disaster and disgrace to all of us—and I tell you, he's capable of anything!"

In the library a telephone bell shrilled. Francesca ex-

cused herself and went to answer it, delivering into the transmitter a stream of Italian so rapid and fluent that Rodney wondered how the person at the other end of the wire contrived to edge in a reply.

But quite evidently he did it without too much difficulty, for when the girl came back it was with the announcement:

"Father won't be home till quite late; but I told him what you had told me, and he says he'd like to see you this evening, if possible."

"Of course: I'll be glad. At what time?"

"Any time after dinner, say nine o'clock, if that suits your convenience."

"Perfectly—and if it didn't I should make my convenience suit it."

She gave him her hand again.

"You are very kind."

"I'd be happy if I thought so—or that you wouldn't hesitate to call on me, Miss Barocco, if ever I can do anything, not as a lawyer but—if you will permit me to call myself—a friend."

The dark eyes grew dim with wistfulness.

"Even troubles have their uses, Mr. Manship, when they bring us friends."

VI

TO appear in evening clothes when making an after-dinner call even of a semi-business nature implies (in the lovely language of that enervating authority who tutors us gratis in theatre programs) the debonnaire habit; it lends an undeniable cachet. And an undeniable cachet being one of the most potent lures an enterprising swain can sport in the sight of the lady who holds his heart in fee—it will be readily understood why, although he was dining alone at his club, Mr. Manship dressed for dinner that night, and dressed with particular pains.

For by this time Rodney was no more in doubt as to the simple nature of his trouble. The face of fatality had proved his fate, free will and fancy were no longer his.

The night was clear and still, its tonic cold rendered walking a delight, the stroll from the club was just long enough. With his nose in the air and his head in the clouds, Rodney approached the street on which the home of the Barocci stood, but on the point of turning to cross Fifth Avenue caught sight of Angelo Barocco on the down-town corner, and pulled up to watch the boy and wonder what mischief he was up to now.

Angelo was skulking somewhat back from the corner, in the half-shadow of a department store. A fur collar turned up to his ears, the brim of a soft hat pulled down over his eyes, gaze intent upon the neighbourhood of his home, to the east of the Avenue—his pose altogether was that of a spying prowler, high-strung with excitement and fearful of detection.

And as if to prove it was mischief he had in mind, he took fright when Rodney's halt on the up-town corner warned him he had attracted attention, with a nervous start swinging round and slinking off toward Sixth Avenue—thereby dissipating all doubt as to his identity, for there could be no mistaking that feline grace which was peculiarly his.

To the riddle of this conduct nothing in the immediate surroundings of the Barocco residence provided any key. The mid-evening quiet was normal, wheeled traffic was entirely wanting save on the avenues, footfarers were few. Across the way a shape in the gray uniform of a private watchman was on leisurely patrol, and a couple whose mutual passion no frost could chill were sauntering in close harmony. On the corner occupied by the antique shop two men of no particular points stood talking, apparently about to part company.

Part they did as Rodney stopped in the Barocco doorway, one vanishing down Madison Avenue, the other moving west toward Fifth. Drawing near, this last produced a cigar, worried off its end with his teeth, spat spiritedly, and swerved in.

"Say, young feller: got a match?"

Rodney nodded, distrustfully eyeing the man as he handed over a folder of paper matches. But when the little flame flared up it ruddled a countenance, plain of feature and not too intellectual of cast, that he knew.

"Why, hello, Ritchey!"

Shrewd grey eyes blinked at Rodney above the fire.

"Oh! it's you, Mr. Manship."

"How's sleuthing nowadays?"

"Pretty dull," the man replied, throwing away the match and poisoning the sweet night air with puffs of rank smoke.

"Wouldn't think you'd find much to do up in this neighbourhood, Ritchey."

"No," the police detective agreed, "you wouldn't, would

you? Well: a guy's got to have some time off the job, same as yourself, Mr. Manship; I guess you ain't out on business either, in that open-faced suit."

"Wrong, Ritchey!" Rodney laughed: "one of my clients lives here. You see it isn't always safe to judge a man by the cut of his jibs."

"No," Ritchey admitted, shifting the cigar from one corner to the other of his mouth—"I guess that's right, all right." And then, as the door opened and soft light washed the entrance, "Well, g'dnight," he added, and ambled on.

Aniello Barocco was waiting alone in the library; and the face he lifted up in the light of his desk-lamp when Rodney entered had aged shockingly since their last meeting. The eyes were haggard that had been so frank and confident, the hand was listless that clasped Rodney's—all that robust gesture of yesterday had wasted into infirmity.

"You aren't ill, I hope, Mr. Barocco?"

A careworn smile failed to carry reassurance. "It's nothing, Mr. Manship, thank you; nothing, at least, that knows any remedy; worry aggravating an old trouble of the heart . . ."

Finding he had unconsciously lifted a hand to press above his heart, Barocco dropped it with a grimace of impatience.

"But please sit down. And thank you for coming. I hope it hasn't inconvenienced you; but after hearing what Francesca had to tell me, it seemed essential I should see you tonight. Mr. Manship: I appeal to your generosity."

"My dear sir!" Rodney exclaimed in astonishment.

"I throw myself and my family upon your mercy," Barocco proceeded earnestly. "We have every reason to believe my son is at the bottom of the annoyances you have suffered; not that I believe Angelo took active part in the burglaries, but that I'm afraid, in his determina-

tion to learn the nature of my will, he was responsible. . . . I gather there were no clues?"

"I believe the Headquarters men collected a few fingerprints."

"Then I have to beg you not to make use of the knowledge which you have gained from Francesca and myself, not to report your suspicions to the police."

"I shouldn't have dreamed of doing so without first asking your consent."

"I thank you." Wagging a heavy head, Barocco pursued: "Age plays the devil with us, Mr. Manship. No, but it is too true: I am not the man I was, I am no longer fit to cope with problems that would once have seemed trifling. Mark how I have blundered trying to deal with Angelo. And now that I must pay the penalty of failure, I have no heart at all to face it with."

"But surely you exaggerate, sir. What if Angelo does resent the loss of his expectations? His conduct, you assure me, has earned him his disinheritance. And what can he do?"

The lacklustre eyes met Rodney's in a stare of melancholy foreboding.

"I cannot tell you," Barocco said—"I dare not tell you what I fear."

From an unseen source near his elbow a strident whistle sounded. He bent over wearily and unhooked from under his desk the speaking-tube that linked the library with the antique shop. Uttering into the mouth-piece a brief response in Italian, he held it to his ear.

What he heard must have been communicated in few words, since he dropped the tube almost immediately; yet their import was enough to kindle panic in his eyes, blanch his face, and bring him to his feet in one startled movement.

But then strength seemed momentarily to forsake him, he faltered and swayed, resting a hand on the desk for support. And Rodney, rising hastily, offered his arm

together with his sympathy, whatever the nature of the blow.

Fugitive appreciation flickered in the dazed eyes, the lips moved feebly but without sound other than a harsh rustle of breathing slow and laboured.

"What is it, Mr. Barocco? You are ill—let me call your daughter."

A shaking hand peremptorily negated the suggestion. In a deep voice of woe Barocco pronounced a single Italian word unintelligible to his hearer, then stumbled from the room.

Delaying a mere instant in doubt what to do, Rodney followed, and in the hallway all but ran into the arms of Francesca coming from the drawing-room. He drew back quickly, with a stammered apology, and the girl, catching his arm, called after her father in his native tongue. Barocco, now half-way down the stairs, descending with hasty, dragging feet, made no answer. He disappeared, they heard his shuffling footsteps in the entrance hall.

"What is it?" Francesca demanded. "What has happened?"

"I don't know—some message from the shop alarmed him. Hadn't we better—?"

But already Francesca was running after her father.

At her heels Rodney passed through the door in the party wall, once more cast as supernumerary in a scene of drama in the history of this strange family.

Aniello Barocco, with a countenance of alarming pallor, breathing with difficulty, his mouth twisted with pain, his legs trembling as if about to buckle with his weight, was leaning on one of the showcases that fenced apart the makeshift office and the body of the shop. Her arms round him, Francesca was looking up anxiously into her father's face, seemingly forgetful of everything but her fears for him.

At a little distance Liborio was holding a pose of

complete nonchalance, back to and elbows planted upon the glass top of another showcase. A leer defiant and ironic wreathed his features but was without reflection in eyes that seemed sly and wary. Indifferent to his brother's distress, he was giving his attention to three business-like if otherwise unprepossessing men who were engaged in rummaging the desk and the several chests and cabinets which stood inside the office space. Another, the police detective Ritchey, was facing Liborio with a grin of triumph and, in his hand, a document of some sort, undoubtedly a warrant.

A fifth detective guarded the Madison Avenue entrance, at the back of the shop a sixth stood sentinel near the iron door.

Out of the corner of an eye Ritchey spied Rodney, and forthwith hailed him: "Hello, Mr. Manship! nothing like being the lawyer on the spot when the big smash happens, is there?"

"Ritchey!" Rodney demanded, striding over to confront the police detective—"what the devil—?"

"Give you one guess, Mr. Manship. I'm still on the Narcotic Squad—and I won't get sent back to pound sidewalks for what I'm pulling off tonight, neither."

"But it can't be possible—!"

"Maybe you're as innocent as you make out, maybe not," Ritchey commented with a grim smile. "Thought you said you was these birds' lawyer? Maybe they don't tell Friend Lawyer all their secrets at that; but you ought to know what kind of clients you've got; and if you don't, I'll tell you and the world they're the kingpins of the dope-smuggling machine in this country."

"I don't believe it!"

Rodney looked to Aniello Barocco, but the grey misery of that face would have silenced him even if he had been insensible to Francesca's glance of pitiful appeal. While all he got from Liborio was a leer and a shrug.

"You must be mistaken, Ritchey—"

"Now, listen, Mr. Manship: you ought to know I wouldn't take no chance of being 'broke' for a bonehead play. I got the goods on these guys, been laying for them for years; and today when the tip come through—"

"Tip?" Liborio Baroque put in with an amused, incredulous inflection.

"I said tip. Some of your Wop friends leaked, Baroque. What they didn't tell us wasn't worth knowing. We got you right now, we know all about how you been getting the stuff smuggled in with antique truck from abroad and distributing it by reselling your shipments piecemeal to other antique dealers. Why! Mr. Manship, for twenty years this nice, quiet, respectable little shop in a nice, quiet, respectable neighbourhood has been the clearing house for fifty per cent of the dope trade in the United States."

Liborio greeted this statement with a derisive flash of teeth.

"A pretty story, very pret-ty; but without evidence, who will believe?"

"Evidence!" Ritchey echoed indignantly. "Lis'n, friend: I'll show you all the evidence you want inside five minutes. If you hadn't turned up when you did, Mr. Manship, and made me leary that maybe you'd tip your friends off, saying something about meeting me, I wouldn't 've hopped the joint until I could 've caught this bird in the act of selling over the counter. We had it all fixed for one of his regulars to drop in and buy a paper of snow—sure! he does a retail business, too—but after I seen you, I didn't dare wait. And if Baroque here thinks we don't know—"

He broke off as, with an exclamation, one of his associates straightened up from a cabinet of Chinese lacquer in the office space.

"What you got, Norton?"

"Only about enough heroin to give every man, woman and child in N'York the jazz for a week," the other

replied with a chuckle. But his next breath was wasted in a yell of warning coincident with a tremendous crash of furniture and crockery.

With an exhibition of readiness and agility amazing in a man of his age, Liborio had taken advantage of the first moment when the attention of Ritchey was diverted. His fist, carrying all his might, drove the detective head-long backward over a low tabouret and into the cinnabar screen, which promptly toppled over upon a table of old lustre and Venetian glassware.

Without pause Liborio plunged for the front of the shop. The man at the door ran to tackle him, but the Italian swerved, found a way through the crowded floor, and leaped upon the low ledge of one of the show-windows.

A mahogany pedestal stood there, among other pieces, supporting a marble bust. Liborio dislodged the latter—the wooden flooring boomed to its impact like a bass-drum—and catching up the pedestal whirled it round his head as if it were a broomstick.

The guardian of the front door, making an ill-advised attempt to close in, was sent sprawling by one blow of the pedestal. Its next fell with shattering force upon the window, and the huge sheet of plate glass rang like cracked bell-metal, then, shivering into a thousand fractions, vanished almost bodily, leaving a wide opening framed with jagged teeth.

The rain of fragments was still clanging and clattering upon the sidewalk when Liborio dropped the pedestal and prepared to leap out. In that act he reared up to his full height, tottering, and fell back, shot through by a bullet from a pistol which the detective Norton had fired close by Rodney's ears.

Half-deafened, confused with horror and dismay, Rodney heard Francesca call out in terror, and looked round to see her bending beneath the weight of her father, whose limbs seemed to be refusing their office, so that

he could neither stand nor hold himself up by the arm which he had flung over the showcase. His face was ghastly, his jaw had dropped, his eyes, more than half-shut, revealed only slits of white beneath drooping lids.

In alarm Rodney moved toward the two, but the girl waved him back with a frantic hand, pointing to the broken window.

"No!" she panted—"go—find out—!"

Rodney turned, to be shouldered aside by Ritchey as that one, cursing, scrambled up from the débris of his downfall and ran toward the spot where the guardian of the door was picking himself up, nursing a bruised shoulder, and where Norton already was bending over the fallen Liborio.

Rising as Rodney came up with Ritchey, Norton greeted them with an uneasy grin.

"Damn' gun of mine kicks like a mule: aimed at his legs and got him through the heart."

"Dead!"

"Worse luck! I'll have a hell of a time explaining why I had to shoot—and all the newspapers yelling bloody murder and printing pieces about a corrupt and brutalized police force."

A sudden commotion, voices of men lifted in warning, the girl crying out in fright, drew them away from the dead man.

Aniello Barocco had collapsed in his daughter's arms. Three detectives, the guard at the rear door and the two who had stopped behind in the office, had rushed to her assistance in time to relieve the girl of the burden of her father and let him gently to the floor. Kneeling by his side, she was wildly demanding that somebody summon medical assistance.

"Telephone for an ambulance," Ritchey ordered.

"Let me have a look," Rodney interposed—"know a bit about first aid—served with the ambulance corps in France."

On his knees he tore open the waistcoat and shirt and placed a hand above the heart. After a moment he laid his cheek close by Aniello's mouth. A shake of his head as he sat back confirmed the fact of death. He dared not look at Francesca.

Giving way to a passion of grief and despair, the girl threw herself upon the bosom of her father.

And presently Rodney got up and stood back, with head bowed, stricken to the heart with pity, his intelligence shaken by a great wonder.

Even as the brothers had foretold, in the same hour . . .

VII

ALONE in the library of the Barocco home, Manship sat writing. His pen moved slowly, he was frowning fretfully to find that concentration demanded unwonted effort. It was late, he was more tired than he knew, the words he needed were unaccountably elusive.

After half a dozen essays had been consigned serially to the waste-basket, he was still trying, still dissatisfied.

“My dear Miss Barocco:

“The sympathy of a comparative stranger can hardly fail, I am afraid, to seem intrusive. But I trust you will permit me to offer mine, and believe in it in spite of my poor efforts to express it.

“It is past midnight now, I cannot think of any way in which I can be useful, and I do not like to disturb you by sending a servant to enquire. So I shall leave this to be given you in the morning.

“I hope very truly you will not hesitate to make every possible use of my services, which are wholly yours to command. The telephone will always find me at either my home or my office.

“At your convenience, as you may care to designate it, I shall be glad to bring and read to you your father’s will. May I suggest that you ask your brother to be present, as well as the other legatees—”

He paused with lifted pen, trying to recollect their names.

The house was still. The police surgeon and the family physician had long since come and gone, the bodies of the two brothers had been carried upstairs, Francesca had disappeared, with, for company and comfort in her

grief, an old Italian servant of the family who had been her nurse. In the shop below, behind drawn shades and a window roughly boarded, the men of the Narcotic Squad, tardily reënforced by a detail of Internal Revenue operatives, were continuing their rummage for contraband drugs. Outside, on the corner, a patrolman was stationed to keep the over-inquisitive moving.

For minutes on end Rodney sat with perplexed eyes staring at nothing. Doubts and confusion still rode his mind. Impossible to reconcile the impression Aniello Barocco had conveyed, of fine simplicity and high-minded honesty, with his proved character of accomplice in the illegal drug traffic.

And Francesca—she, too, had known!

Rodney could almost as readily have believed himself guilty . . .

His abstraction was dissipated by a heavy tread upon the stairs. Hands in pockets, derby pushed back on his head, complacency and a dead cigar decorating his countenance, Detective Sergeant Ritchey strolled in.

"Thought I'd look in and say g'dnight, Mr. Manship."

Rodney roused with an effort.

"All finished, Ritchey?"

"Yeah—call it a night. Cleaned up pretty; must be a couple hundred thousand dollars' worth of dope they're loadin' into the wagon now. Say! them Internal Revenue birds 're the sickest lookin' lot y'veer seen, the way us hick cops put it over 'em. If it wasn't for that shootin', I'd die laughin'."

"I can't understand it," Rodney protested.

"Listen, Mr. Manship: I'll let you in on a secret. Only, don't you go givin' the graft away. Bull-headed luck turned this trick for us. And that's more than fifty per cent of good detective work—plain, or'nary luck. The rest's just knowin' how to wait and somethin' about the kind of game you're gunnin' for. And don't let nobody ever tell you dif'rent."

Understanding that a direct question would never do, Rodney stooped to guile.

"Oh! you're too modest, Ritchey."

"Who, me? Don't kid yourself. Anytime you catch me blushin'ly refusin' to say it with flowers about W. K. Ritchey, I'll give you a handsome present. No, on the level: if it hadn't been for luck we'd still be guessin'. Why! for years we've had it figured out that more than half the stuff gettin' past the Customs was handled by one central receivin' and distributin' station, but we never could get a line on who or where—more'n they was Eyetalians."

"Italians?"

"Sure! Every time we'd pinch one of the little fellers—you know, the peddlers—and give'm the squeeze, the trail'd always lead back to some Eyetalian and stop right there, some Wop who'd either come through with an armour-plate alibi or go up the River ruther'n squeal. They're all like that, them Eyetalians—they *never* know nothin' on each other."

"But today, I gather, one did squeal."

"I ain't sayin' who wised us up. One of the first rules for a good dick is, never tell on your stool-pigeon so long's he gives you service. But you got to admit it was one hot young tip."

"Then it was treachery from the inside?"

"Listen: if they was any honour among thieves, like the poet says—if crooks didn't never get sore on each other and blow the works to get even, or get scared and think it'd be good business to stand in with us cops—us detectives could look for reg'lar work, somethin' else that don't put too much strain on the old int'lect."

"But what I can't understand, Ritchey, is how that fine old man and his daughter—!"

Ritchey gave a grunt of worldly wisdom. "I'll say you go pretty strong on appearances, for a lawyer, Mr. Manship. You don't suppose I'm talkin' intimate' like

this to you on the strength of your front, do you? If I hadn't known you and your father before you, you'd have a grand time makin' me believe you wasn't in with this outfit, clean over your ears. But knowin' you like I do, I know it's just like you told me: you come here to draw old Aniello's will, and that lets you out. But what do you *know* about him? Just because he's a slick talker don't prove nothin'. Just because his daughter's one swell looker don't make father out an innocent. If you want to know what the family's like, take a slant at his brother and his son. That's the breed with the polish off—you can see the grain."

"So you know Angelo."

"Not person'ly," said the detective grimly—"but I heard a lot about him. For a lad his age, he sure sets a mean pace."

Below, a hasty hand closed the front door. Rodney nodded, with a half smile.

"If you've never met the little gentleman," he said, listening to a rush of impatient feet on the stairs, "I fancy this is your chance."

Though he watched suspiciously, even his prejudiced vision could detect nothing artificial in the surprise that brought Angelo up standing when, in a state of undisguised agitation, he broke impetuously into the room. Initial bewilderment and dawning consternation were reflected in the gaze that shifted between Rodney's level and steady stare and the openly ironic regard of the detective.

"What the devil!" he exclaimed; then to Rodney directly: "What are you doing here?"

"Waiting for another look at you," Rodney told him quietly—"to make sure it was you I saw on the corner of Fifth Avenue about three hours ago."

The reminder won him a black scowl. Angelo's glance swung uneasily round the room and back to Ritchey.

"Who are you?"

"Detective Sergeant William K. Ritchey, of the Narcotic Squad, young feller." With this an elaborate bow. "Compliments of Dr. Copeland, and I'm the little guy what pulled the raid downstairs that winds up your dope smugglin' sideline."

"Mine!" Angelo disclaimed in sudden alarm—"I never had anything to do with it."

"Guess that settles your doubts about the whole family bein' in the know, Mr. Manship."

"You can't prove it—you haven't got anything on me!"

"No," Ritchey admitted regretfully; "that's gospel, I haven't. But cheer up, little one! I'll get you yet."

"Damn your impudence!"

"Now! be nice—or maybe I'll change my mind about not takin' you along to be held as a material witness."

Half-frantic with impotent resentment, Angelo trembled visibly.

"Where," he stammered—"where's my father?"

Without answering, Ritchey stared gloomily at the boy for a moment, then looked to Rodney.

"Guess I'll be on my way, Mr. Manship. G'dnight."

He shifted the cigar to the other extreme of his mouth without removing his hands from his pockets, and ignoring Angelo, left with the easy slouch of an honest man who foresees an early end to a good day's work.

Exasperated, the boy flung over to Rodney, where he sat quietly observant.

"Where's my father? Where's Uncle Liborio? Have they been arrested?"

"Death has arrested them, Mr. Barocco."

"Death!" The boy reeled back as if Rodney had struck him, his face took on the hue of lead. "My father—dead!"

"Your uncle was shot trying to escape, your father died of heart failure a moment later."

"God! I never—"

Whatever he had meant to say, Angelo bit it off

abruptly. A hand as delicate as a girl's moved uncertainly to his forehead as he stood, mouth ajar, eyes wide, staring at nothing.

"You never what, Mr. Barocco?"

Angelo collected his wits in haste.

"I never really took much stock in it," he faltered—"that stuff about twins always dying together. But now—when it's happened for the third time in two generations—!"

"And that's all your father's death means to you."

"No—no, you're wrong." Rodney's contempt stung deep; Angelo flushed hotly, bitter animosity glimmered in his eyes. "No: that isn't all it means to me. Among other things it means I'm master here now and you—you're offensive to me. Get out of my house!"

Rodney choked back a surge of anger in his throat, and picked up his pen.

"Whether or not you're master here remains to be seen or, rather, to be heard, when your father's will is read. Nevertheless, I'm glad to find your wish and mine agree. As soon as I finish this note to your sister—"

But with that he dropped the pen again, and rose. Francesca stood in the doorway. In dismay, Angelo whirled to face her.

A velvet house-robe of purple, little less than black, cloaked her with flowing folds to her feet, save that sweetly turned arms, bare below the elbows, gleamed like Parian marble against that rich background. Nor was there more colour in the rounded throat or the exquisitely chiseled face—other than violet rings beneath her eyes.

In the gaze she bent upon her brother there was a question, her very silence spelled an accusation.

Only for a moment did he try to brazen it out. Then even his effrontery failed, his eyes winced, his mouth twitched.

"Damn it!" he cried in shrill petulance—"why d'you look at me like that?"

The girl moved one pace toward him, and he started back in something nearly resembling panic.

"Angelo!" she said, pausing—her voice was the very voice of woe—"what have you done?"

"What do you mean, what have I done? I haven't done anything, I've just come home from a party, I—"

"I was waiting for you," Francesca gently explained. "When I heard voices here, I thought it must be you, and came down to find out. But it was that man, that detective, talking to Mr. Manship; and—well—I heard him say this terrible calamity tonight could never have happened without treachery. Angelo! somebody betrayed Uncle Liborio to the police. Do you know who—?"

"No—of course not! How should I know?"

"You know everybody who could have done it. . . . And, Angelo, you know your own heart."

Either the boy was deliberately working himself into a rage, or else he was going out of his mind with fear—cowering away from Francesca, refusing to meet her regard, fairly gibbering denials.

"What's my heart got to do with it?" He ripped out a string of black Italian oaths—but his voice was shaky. "Are you accusing me?"

"I say you know or can find out who did this thing. I say you must find out, and will—that you won't rest till you do—if you are your father's son!"

"It's a lie! I don't know, and I don't know how to find out. You're crazy—out of your head! How—"

"Angelo!" Advancing as he retreated, the girl had him with his back to the desk; and as he was on the point of darting aside, she put a detaining hand to his wrist. "Angelo! are you my brother?"

"Let go of me!" The boy shook her off. "Stop staring at me like that! I won't stand your accusing me—"

"I don't accuse—I ask."

"You let me alone, keep away!" She had caught his arm again and was holding on despite his resistance.

"Let go of me or—!" Of a sudden his rage seemed to pass into sheer madness, he faced her raving. "Damn you! keep off or I'll murder you!"

"I'm not afraid, Angelo. You value your own life too highly."

"Well! then—by God! I'll scar you for life."

With a deftness approaching legerdemain his hand slipped into and out of a pocket. Above his head steel shimmered, menacing the face of his sister. Instantly Rodney grasped his shoulders and dragged him screaming, kicking and cursing, back across the desk. Inkstands and fittings flew, the lamp crashed to the floor, darkness fell, relieved by the dim light from the hallway. But Rodney had the knife.

He contrived to drop it into his coat-pocket without losing the mastery, then for a moment held Angelo helpless with pinioned arms.

"You rat!" he cried, and shook his victim as if he were in fact a rat. "If ever again you lift a hand to your sister, I'll break every bone in your body!"

He flung the boy away and, in the sudden illumination that followed when Francesca at the wall switched on the chandelier, saw Angelo land on his back with a thump that wrung from him a cry of pain.

Quivering like a whipped animal, he rested briefly—eyes half shut, lips compressed to an ugly line, fists clenched, all betraying a desperate struggle to assert self-control. Then the fit passed and, relaxing, he picked himself up; but when he stood erect, with steady hands readjusting collar and necktie, Rodney perceived in the steadfast regard of eyes like black diamonds set in a countenance whose pallor fairly blazed, that he had succeeded only in transmuting insensate anger into mortal hatred.

Francesca moved between them, offering a hand of pardon and appeal. But her brother would not see it; and though he no longer hesitated to confront her, but

gave her back look for look, there was in his expression if anything even a deeper rancor than he had for Rodney.

"Angelo," she pleaded—"forgive me if I've hurt you—forget, please, if I have said anything unkind or unjust. Remember, I am half distracted with grief. You know how dear he was to me, what nobility of heart and soul has been taken from us tonight. Surely my sorrow is yours!"

She checked on a sob. Angelo stood watching her like a frozen shape of malevolence.

With a struggle she continued:

"Angelo: alone with his poor body, an hour ago, with my hand on his dear dead bosom I swore an oath to find and expose the traitor who had brought him to his death. It is a sacred duty we owe to his memory, you and I."

Indigation quickened out of the incredulity with which Francesca read her brother's response in his silence. Slowly her body stiffened, her shoulders straightened, her head lifted, till she was actually looking down at him, lifted above his stature by her scorn.

"Then know this: with or without your help, against your opposition if it comes to that, though it take my lifetime, though it cost me my life, I shall keep my vow. And when I have found the man, whoever he may be, I shall denounce him—you know to whom. You know, too, the penalty of"—with barely perceptible hesitation she finished in Italian—"'*nfamita!*'"

Whatever the ulterior significance of that word, whatever meaning attached to it in their common understanding beyond that which was intelligible enough to Rodney in the mere sound of it, that it had found the chink in Angelo's armour was apparent in his flinching eyes, in his sharp gesture of expostulation and affright. But instantly he caught himself and recovered, presenting again to Francesca a stony mask of despute.

"Thank Heaven that's settled!" he sneered, and wheeling strode from the room.

VIII

EVER since the death of his father had left him alone in the world, Rodney Manship had made his home in rooms near by his clubs, in the lower Fifties near Fifth Avenue. Here, on the second night following the raid on the antique shop, he entertained an unexpected caller in the person of Detective Sergeant Ritchey.

"Happened to be passin' by," this last genially explained, when he had been made comfortable with a cigar between his teeth and a drink at his elbow, "'nd thought I'd drop in and see if you knew anythin'."

"About that unfortunate affair? Not a thing—more than what the papers have told me, that is."

"Thought maybe you'd been seein' somethin' more of Miss Baroque and that prize brother of hers."

"No. I'm to call tomorrow to read them their father's will; but I haven't heard or seen anything of either since that night."

"Except, of course," Ritchey corrected, "at the cemetery today."

"But that was only at a distance," Rodney insisted, colouring slightly. "You see, their father had been an old client of my father's, so I thought it only decent to show that much respect. But since I'm not either a relation or close friend, I naturally kept out of the way. I don't believe Miss Baroque saw me."

"Maybe not," the detective allowed; "but summonelse did: Friend Angelo."

"Think so?"

"Uh-huh; and registered hostility, like they say in the movies."

"I wonder!" Rodney mused.

As a matter of fact, he had been wondering about that incident ever since. The impulse which had made him leave his desk and seek the cemetery at the hour appointed had been, of course, more naïve than the reason he had just alleged; and he had vaguely regretted yielding to it, as they so often do who are supple to impulses sentimental. To begin with, it had failed of its ulterior purpose; he had not succeeded in getting near enough to the grave, thanks to the throng of ostensible mourners characteristic of Italian funerals, to catch a fair glimpse of the face of fatality. He had seen Francesca only from a distance, she had lifted her veil only for an instant, toward the close of the service, when her profile was revealed, cameo-like in its sweet, white immobility against the dead background of her weeds. She was not weeping, her grief was too deep for that, not a shadow of other feeling relieved the utter sadness of her expression as, with head a little bowed, she listened to the orotund accents of the priest and, with eyes downcast, watched the lowering of the twin coffins.

With Angelo it had been otherwise. He had seemed to take a certain mean pride in parading callous apathy, had held throughout a pose of indolent impatience—a slight sneer twisting his lips, his gaze boldly roving. And once his glance had identified Rodney on the outskirts of the crowd, or the latter was mistaken, and his sneer darkened. Immediately, however, he looked another way; and it was some time later when Rodney had reason to believe that Angelo had pointed him out to another Italian, who seemed to be staring at the American as if bent on memorizing his features.

But it might all have been merely imagination. . . . Or so Rodney had assured himself prior to his talk with Ritchey.

“Didn’t know you were so devoted to duty as to attend funerals,” he commented, rousing from his reverie. “Not me, thanks. One of the other boys was there

to get an eye-full of the crowd and see if maybe any of 'em looked like he needed watchin'."

"Did your colleague pick up anything helpful?"

"Maybe so," Mr. Ritchey liberally admitted—"maybe not."

Rodney grinned appreciatively. "I gather you didn't get much out of Angelo."

That one, he knew, had spent several unhappy hours at Police Headquarters on the morning following the raid.

"It would 've surprised you," the detective admitted, "what a hell of a lot Angelo didn't know. Of course he knew what 'd been goin' on in the shop, and didn't pretend he didn't; but he stuck to it he never had no hand in the business. And if you ask me, I'll say he told the truth there—for once in his young life."

"What makes you think that?"

Instead of answering the detective got up quickly and strode over to Rodney's desk.

"What's this?" he demanded, examining the knife which Rodney had taken from Angelo. "What you doin' with a settesoldi?"

"A what?"

"Settesoldi—Eyetalian for this kind of dagger."

"What a lot you know, Ritchey."

"Lis'n: Joe Petrosino. . . . Remember the Wop detective that used to play horse with the Black Handers till they murdered him over in Italy ten—twelve years ago? Say! that was one reg'lar guy. Him and me used to be side-kicks. I got a lot of info off him about the way them Wops works." Ritchey balanced the long, thin blade on his palm. "Where'd you pick this up, Mr. Manship?"

Rodney explained, and Ritchey's look grew more serious.

"That's a bad actor, that boy," he commented. "I'd give a lot if we'd been able to hitch him up with the

dope smugglin' trade, and ship him back to the reservation. He ain't safe s'long's he's loose; I tell you straight, if I was you and Mister Angelo had as much cause to pack a mad on me, I'd walk a heap o' blocks to keep out of his way."

"You're joking, Ritchey."

"Like hell . . . I don't feel like jokin' tonight, and I got a good right not to."

Rodney asked why.

"Well!" the detective grimly replied: "I just come from seein' Norton."

"The man who shot Liborio? What did he have to say? Is he still afraid of trouble because he was so quick on the trigger?"

"He didn't have nothin' to say, and he ain't afraid of no trouble of any sort—now. He's croaked."

"Dead!"

"Pumped full of lead three doors from his house by a taxicab-full of Wop gunmen, just after dark this evenin'. He'd just got a couple weeks' leave and was goin' out o' town to lay low for a while. Leaves a wife and two kids. The taxi got away clean—nobody even lamped its number. That's what *he* got for shootin' up a prominent Eyetalian citizen, uncle of little playmate Angelo. Now do you get me?—understand why I say you'd better keep out of Angelo's way as much as you can and try and not get his goat if you do run into him? Oh, I don't say he'd go so far's to give you what Norton got; but gettin' beat up ain't no fun neither, and maybe spendin' the rest of your life in a wheel-chair. Take my advice, and don't go walkin' alone at night, and don't go ridin' in no taxis you don't know where they come from. Say, lis'n: ever been to Palm Beach? Whyn't you run down there for a spell?"

IX

BUT if Ritchey had any real hope that Rodney would heed his warning, his professional lifetime had taught him singularly little about human nature.

Rodney was neither more nor less confident of his ability to take care of himself than the next man of his age and mettle; but his was the normal idiosyncrasy of the Anglo-Saxon, who is never quite able to believe that the Latin really means it when he gives a melodramatic gesture. The tradition of Anglo-Saxon phlegm is responsible for a great deal of nonsense in our minds, but for nothing more stupid than our cultivated indisposition to take what we term melodrama seriously; whereas the most superficial student of humanity knows that the average man is instinctively "melodramatic" the moment he forgets to be self-conscious.

Required to sum up his impressions of Angelo at that stage of their acquaintance, Rodney would probably have employed the phrase "an unlicked cub"; not that he believed a good licking would exorcize the spirit of malice in the boy, but that it ought to teach him a sorely needed lesson, to wit, that there were limits to the patience of Society with youngsters who barged about flourishing knives and pistols and murderous black looks and playing the giddy goat is general.

Furthermore, Rodney could find nothing definite to support Ritchey's assumption that Norton had been shot down by Italian gunmen bent on avenging the death of Liborio Baroque. No eyewitnesses had come forward to testify that the occupants of the taxicab were Italians. They might very well have been nondescript criminals, taking advantage of a chance recounter to pay off old

scores. Norton was reputed to have been a tolerably busy Nemesis to wrong-doers in general, without discrimination in respect of nationality. Many other than Italians had been given ample reason to desire his death. That it had overtaken him in violent form so soon after the Baroque affair might very well have been a simple coincidence.

Thus it was without serious misgivings that Rodney called at the Barocco home at noon of the day after the funeral.

The manservant who showed him up to the library left him alone there while he summoned "the signor and signorina."

A heart that knew her footfalls on the staircase as soon as they became audible was out of all control by the time Francesca entered the room. His gaze dwelt hungrily upon her face, and found it fairer even than his memories had portrayed it, fairer for the very sign of her sorrow that it wore. Pathetically grave and sweet, slender and graceful in her deep mourning, she came directly to him and put her hand in his.

"My dear friend," she said simply: "I hurried down to see you—to thank you. It was like you to be—there—yesterday."

She had seen him, after all!

"I couldn't keep away," he said, apologetic. "It seemed the only way to show my respect and sympathy. . . . You had called on me for nothing . . . I thought you wouldn't mind."

"It was like you," she repeated. "To see you—helped—a little."

It was not a time when a woman of sensibility would stoop to trifling. Neither was Francesca conceivably one who could be unaware of the inference implicit to any man of intelligence in so open an avowal of regard. Nevertheless, there was this to be remembered, that she was speaking under stress of emotion that might well

have warped her sense of proportion and had, moreover, nothing at all to do with romantic love.

"I am glad," Rodney replied with restraint. "I only wish I might have been really helpful, some way. You haven't any idea how I've hated to think of your being left alone here—nobody but servants—!"

"It was best for me . . ."

"I know. Still, I'd have felt more at ease in mind if I could have been sure you would remember me in event of trouble."

"You mean, in event of Angelo," the girl interpreted. "But I've had no trouble with him. He was good—or selfish—enough to keep out of my way—except yesterday, of course. If I didn't know him better, I should be grateful to him for being so thoughtful. Unhappily, I do."

"Perhaps you have the police to thank for your immunity," Rodney suggested. "I mean—I presume you know—they invited your brother down to Headquarters, the other morning, to be questioned." Then catching the flash of startled enquiry in her eyes before her lips could frame negative or query, he continued hastily: "But I understand they got nothing out of him—if he knew anything."

He fancied a fugitive gleam of challenge in her look. If so, she was quickly satisfied that Rodney was not seeking to disguise the truth, for the sake of her peace of mind.

"Angelo knows enough," she said in subdued bitterness—"too much—far more than I. But of course he would never tell."

"You don't mean me to understand that he—?"

"No: he had nothing to do with the smuggling. Though that wasn't his fault, but simply because he couldn't get on with my uncle. It seems odd, I know, that the two 'baroques' of the family should have been so completely unsympathetic; but it's true. They were

always quarreling, Uncle Liborio and Angelo; and strangely enough, my uncle was as much opposed as my father to Angelo's"—she hesitated and finished lamely—"doing what he did to make father disinherit him."

"You mean," Rodney prompted before he thought, "when he became a 'novice' and 'took the vows'?"

Her dismay was unconcealed. "What do you mean?" she demanded in a breath. "Mr. Manship! what do you know?"

"Nothing, believe me, Miss Barocco. Only I happened to recall your father's words, that night when we first met. You remember, when you told him you'd found Angelo out in some mischief you didn't name—?"

A swift search of his countenance soothed her alarms. She had a hinted shrug of relief.

"I had forgotten—or hoped you had."

"If that is your wish—I have."

"Thank you, my friend." With a look wistful and deprecating she let her hand rest in Rodney's for a moment. "You know," she went on, with the wan shadow of a smile, "you have succeeded in making me quite confident of you, somehow."

"You may be," Rodney assured her earnestly, "without fear of any disappointment. I can think of nothing I wouldn't do rather than forfeit your faith—since you tell me I am fortunate enough to have won it."

"I am sure of that. And yet. . . ." She faltered between impulse and constraint. "Oh!" she cried mutinously—"I wish I might be frank with you, tell you everything, ask your advice."

"Why not?" he urged gently. "Communications between lawyer and client are privileged, you know."

Long lashes veiled her eyes, she shook her head, drew away her hand.

"No: I can't explain, it's impossible."

"At present, no doubt: you are the best judge of that. But perhaps another day—?"

"No, never! Please believe me, Mr. Manship—I appreciate your kindness and want to make you understand, but can't because—there are the gravest reasons. . . . Only one thing I must tell you: about father—I can't let you go on thinking he had anything to do with that drug smuggling."

Rodney interposed, "I never did," but she did not heed.

"That was Uncle Liborio's affair alone. Father knew, of course, and disapproved, would have done anything to put a stop to it; but my uncle would never listen to him, and father was powerless, he could do nothing, his hands were bound."

"I never for an instant doubted that. I don't believe it was possible for anybody to know your father, even as little as I knew him, and doubt his essential honesty."

Rodney had spoken without calculation, but the craftiest of lovers could not more shrewdly have prospered his suit. Gratitude was lambent in the eyes of the girl, behind a veil of unshed tears; the woeful line of her lips softened, they were tremulous with the fluttering syllables of her response.

"Oh, thank you—thank you for that!"

In that instant, in that humour, she was his. He knew it, but no better than she. And a little silence lengthened between them, while they stood astare, contemplating incredulously that bright revelation which had been granted unto them, shaken by the drumming of their pulses, each breathlessly aware that Rodney had only to open his arms. . . .

But there were voices in the hallway, footsteps, rustling petticoats.

Francesca started slightly, drew back, and found a chair to one side of the desk as the servants entered—her old nurse, the cook, the housekeeper, the manservant—all Italians of the peasant class, in makeshift mourning, wearing faces of solemnity that were not altogether

successful in dissembling the keen curiosity and cupidity that informed them every one.

Quaint courtesies were accorded Rodney as custodian of the instrument through which they were presently to profit. He gave formal bows in return. The servants settled into chairs ranged stiffly against the wall farthest from the window. Then Angelo came in, with a high head and a fleering mouth, defiance in his very stride. With him he introduced a new equation, a gentleman whom Rodney had not seen before.

A man of medium inches, with a tendency toward stoutness, florid of person, this one wore chequered trousers with a grey morning coat whose black braiding was as broad as a jest in bad taste; a grey ascot transfixed by a large pearl, a white linen waistcoat and spats, and the shiniest of patent leather shoes, completed the effulgent ensemble. And as he stopped and bowed ceremoniously to Rodney, white teeth flashed in an olive-tinted, boldly featured face of Italian cast.

"Mr. Manship, I believe?" Rodney found himself shaking a plump and highly manicured hand that boasted a notable growth of silky black hairs on its back, and on its fingers two massive gold rings, set with a seal and a huge solitaire diamond. "I am Mr. Leo Croce—attorney for Mr. Angelo Baroque."

"Oh!" said Rodney—"indeed?"

Perfunctory and colourless, the exclamation dissembled astonishment and misgivings. Why had Angelo thought it necessary to bring counsel to the reading of his father's will? Was he meaning to contest it, then? If so, on what grounds?

Rodney looked to Francesca for enlightenment, but gathered nothing from the composure with which she was suffering the addresses of Mr. Croce, with whom she seemed to be on terms of indifferent acquaintance.

Ignoring Rodney and his sister, Angelo had thrown himself into a chair to the right of the desk. Mr. Croce

retreated to a seat beside his client, and hiked up the knees of his trousers till an inch or so of lurid sock burned above either spat; after which a genial flash of teeth signified that, so far as he was personally concerned, there was no need for more delay.

Again Rodney silently consulted Francesca. She gave a slight inclination of the head. He sat down, took the will from his brief-case, and began to read.

An attentive hush was disturbed only by subdued rustlings on the part of the minor legatees, till Rodney finished, placed the will on the desk before him, and looked round the ring of faces.

Francesca was sitting with head bowed and downcast gaze fixed upon slim, white, motionless fingers interlaced in her lap. The servants were stirring, gesticulating, exchanging hoarse whispers of congratulation. Angelo, with his feet sprawling, his hands in his pockets, and his head thrown back, was staring at a corner of the ceiling, a sneer disfiguring his handsome features. Mr. Croce, however, was on the alert for Rodney's eye, and favoured him with another flash of teeth.

"If you do not mind, Mr. Manship," he suggested silkily—"the date of that document again?"

Rodney repeated it.

"Ah, yes! I was not mistaken, then. I thought it could not possibly postdate the will in our possession."

"The will in your possession!"

"Just so," purred Mr. Croce, producing a folded paper with a legal backing. "Executed in my office only a few hours before his lamentable demise, this, I am confident, will be found to be the last will and testament of Mr. Aniello Barocco, or Baroque, deceased."

"I beg your pardon!" Rodney sat forward sharply. "Are you sure?"

This time Mr. Croce showed his teeth less engagingly.

"I hope I misunderstand you, Mr. Manship. I should be sorry to think you were disputing my good faith."

Francesca had lifted her head and was watching Angelo with a face inscrutable. Rodney's eyes hardened and his mouth as well.

"I shall be better instructed as to my answer, Mr. Croce," he crisply returned, "when we have heard you read this second will."

"Perhaps you will be good enough to read it to us, Mr. Manship." The Italian rose and with a graceful bow of mockery thinly masked presented the document. "You will find it differs from what you have just read in one material respect only," he added, resuming his seat. "The minor bequests are identical; but my client, not his sister, is made the chief beneficiary. Look it over, Mr. Manship—satisfy yourself."

Rodney snapped the paper open, then turned to Francesca.

"What do you say? Shall I read it aloud, Miss Barocco?"

"Not unless you think it worth while," the girl returned in cool accents, without looking away from her brother. "I don't think it should be necessary, I have no doubt you'll find it is precisely as Mr. Croce says."

Rodney hesitated, then with a shrug turned his attention to the paper. But his face grew red and his gorge rose with resentment of the effrontery of the thing: an impudent paraphrase of the very will which he had composed and of which a copy had been stolen from his office, with only sufficient rewording here and there to lend it a colourful semblance of original composition, and in every instance with the name of Angelo appearing where Francesca's had appeared and vice versa.

All but trembling with indignation, he looked up at length; but a glimpse of polite teeth, as Mr. Croce smilingly waited upon his verdict, served as cold water to the hot metal of his anger; and it was with voice and hand steady enough that he rose and approached Francesca.

"Mr. Croce's statements are quite in order," he announced, "as to the tenor of this—ah—writing. But if you will examine the signature, Miss Barocco, and tell me whether or not you believe it to be genuine—"

"Sir!"—Mr. Croce jumped up as if suddenly stung—"are you aware of the nature of that innuendo?"

Rodney met his glare with calm eyes of contempt.

"I am," he replied, and showed the man his shoulder, attentive to Francesca alone.

It seemed to him she needed an inordinately long time to make up her mind. Once she looked up with illegible eyes and for several seconds studied the face of her brother. Rodney paid that one no attention, but was sensitive to an intuitive impression that something was going on outside the bounds of his perception, something secret was being communicated between brother and sister, with no word spoken and, so far as he could tell, no sign given. Then again Francesca bowed her head above the will, and after a little folded it, rose, and gave it back to Rodney.

"The signature is good," she said quietly.

Mr. Croce interjected an "*Ah!*" of great gratification.

But Rodney was satisfied that the girl had lied.

It wasn't, however, his part to dispute her. If she were content to let herself be cheated out of a goodly fortune and see her father's wishes set at nought by a trick of brazen fraudulence, one could do nothing but bow to her decision.

He did bow slightly in token of his deference to her will, then turning restored the paper to the ready hand of Mr. Croce.

"Thank you very much," said that gentleman with, of course, a dental flash. "I quite understand, Mr. Manship, and respect your anxiety to protect the interests of a client. I am willing to admit it was a natural question you raised just now, natural under the circumstance,

even though it impugned the honour of my client and myself."

"I am sorry, Mr. Croce," said Rodney. "But really—don't you think?—it would be as well to save up your generosity for the time when I am ready to apologize."

The Italian stiffened and drew back with a dark countenance relieved by no glittering teeth; but Angelo started up in a rage and shouldered between the two.

"That'll be all from you!" he snarled in Rodney's face. "Now—I guess you know who's master here, at last! And what I've got to say to you is just this—once and for all time—get out! And don't show your face here again unless you're ready to take the consequences."

Deliberately Rodney turned his back to Angelo. "I'm sorry, Miss Barocco," he said. "I would have been glad had I been able to serve you to more purpose. As it is, I'm sure you know you have only to call on me at any time." He offered a hand. "Good afternoon."

"Not yet, Mr. Manship," said Francesca. "If you don't mind, I'm going with you. As Angelo says, he is now master here; and since that is so, my place is elsewhere. If you'll be kind enough to give me a lift in your taxi and drop me at a hotel, I'll send back for my things."

X

OPPPOSITION on the part of Angelo blazed up instantaneously, and—when it dawned on him that Francesca actually meant to make good her promise—ranged the emotional gamut from plaintive prayers and expostulation to impassioned argument, denunciation, even threats. Or so one surmised whose only clues were in the swiftly changing nuances of his torrential Italian, his facial play and incessantly weaving hands of illustration.

And if it seemed surprising, this sudden show of consternation at the prospect of immediate and final severance of relations with the sister whom he had given so much cause to fear and shun him, one had only to recall what the father had said concerning the peculiar psychic bond between the twins, by virtue of which (and in the case of Angelo especially) neither could be happy or at ease if denied the society of the other for any considerable time.

But he raged and raved, prayed and protested all in vain. And in vain did Mr. Leo Croce seek to soothe the troubled domestic waters with the unctuous oils of eloquence and diplomatic persuasiveness. As vain were the lamentations of the servants, voiced with the freedom of old friends, when they saw themselves threatened with the loss of the one remaining member of the household who held any true title to their respect and affection.

Go Francesca would, and that without a minute of avoidable delay; and go she did in spite of every effort to dissuade her.

In Rodney's sight there was something at once amusing and admirable in the way the girl, coolly ignoring

the storm of which she was the focal point, made her arrangements. The manservant she told off to fetch a taxicab, her old nurse she instructed to stay behind, pack up such belongings as she would need overnight, and bring them on to the hotel. The housekeeper would attend to packing and forwarding the remainder.

Then, telling Rodney that she would be grateful if he would wait at the door while she donned her wraps, Francesca brushed past the still furiously protesting Angelo and his attorney as if unaware of their existence, with unimpaired dignity left the library and went upstairs to her room.

The servants followed; and after a moment of agonized indecision, Angelo flung out in pursuit of his sister.

Picking up his brief-case, Rodney likewise made for the door, but pulled up at the earnest instance of Mr. Croce.

"A moment, if you please, Mr. Manship—one little minute."

"Well?"

The Italian gave a deprecating gesture with a placating display of teeth.

"This is all so unfortunate! These unhappy children, quarreling in the very shadow of their father's death! But you have great influence with Miss Barocco—one sees that, Mr. Manship—and I, perhaps, a little with my client. Let us forget our differences, you and I, and try to patch up this deplorable misunderstanding."

"Why?"

"But surely! what worthier motive could we ask than the hope of reuniting brother and sister at such a time!"

"Mr. Croce," Rodney advised: "if we're to get anywhere, you'll have to quit talking rot. I'm willing to co-operate with you, if you can make me see any possible profit to my client in a reconciliation with this bad egg of a brother of hers. But I warn you frankly, you'll have to be plausible to overcome my prejudices."

"My dear sir!"

"If you ask me, your client is about as thorough-paced a young rotter as I want ever to meet. If I were his sister, I'd see him sizzle in hellfire before I'd forgive him his outrageous performance of this afternoon—this production of an alleged will which you know as well as I was executed under duress of some sort—if it's anything better than a downright forgery!"

A livid flush darkened the face of the Italian.

"Take care, Mr. Manship!"

"I'm measuring my words, Mr. Croce, and I'll answer to you for every one of them you've got the cheek to challenge, before the Bar Association or elsewhere, at your pleasure. As for your client, you may tell him with my compliments that, any time he feels called upon to cut up nasty, I ask nothing better than a fair excuse to put him where he belongs—behind the bars!"

To Rodney's immense disappointment, Mr. Croce got the better of the symptoms of apoplexy which had seemed to promise incontinently to carry him off, and proved himself master of his temper as well, executing a very creditable bow and replying in a voice of all but imperceptible tremor:

"I shall not fail to deliver your message, sir. As for myself, you shall hear from me without delay."

Not to be outdone, Rodney bowed in turn, and marched out and down to the entrance-hall.

He had not long to wait. The manservant had barely succeeded in finding a taxicab when Francesca appeared, hatted, furred, and unattended. Rodney had anticipated at the best one last scene with Angelo; but whether that one had given it up in despair or Francesca had contrived to slip away while his back was turned, she came alone; and Rodney was able to conduct her to the cab without another clash.

"The Chatham, please," she said, and when Rodney had repeated the address to the driver and taken his seat

beside her, added the explanation: "I have a dear friend living there, Madame Farusi, the singer."

"I've never heard her. Sings in concert mostly, doesn't she?"

"Yes. She is delightful, and with her I shan't be too lonely."

"I am glad," Rodney said, sincerely relieved.

It was only a few minutes' ride, and rather a silent one; for Rodney, understanding what troubled deeps of feeling lay beneath Francesca's surface calm and what the latter must cost her to maintain, was studious to say nothing to disturb it.

He had his reward in the look and tone with which she thanked him, on arriving at the Chatham, and gave him leave to call her up in the evening and enquire if there were anything more that he could do. And then he went back to his office and did his best to make amends for his neglect of the affairs of other clients, but all too often found the face of fatality, a vivid vision of richly tinted loveliness, burning through the cold black-and-white text to which he was endeavouring to fix his attention.

When he telephoned after dinner, Francesca assured him that it went well enough with her, everything considered. And she was in better spirits than he had hoped, or her voice deceived him. She had been fortunate enough to secure rooms adjoining the apartment of Madame Farusi; Marcella, her nurse, had duly turned up with the first installment of her personal belongings and had announced her settled determination never to leave one whom she had served since childhood; and, finally, Madame Farusi had been most kind and, on learning that Francesca wanted an early conference with her legal adviser, had suggested that it might be agreeable if Mr. Manship would consent to dine with them the following night.

So Rodney hung up in a tolerably contented frame of mind, telling himself that the dull life of a lawyer in

general practice had after all its compensations; since such happiness as he had in prospect would have been out of the question, in view of the convenances, had he not been, at least to the world, first of all the attorney in his relation to Francesca Barocco.

And when he turned in, a still more exhilarating reflection banished all thought of sleep at the very moment when its weight was most leaden upon his senses.

Whether or not the second will of Aniello Barocco were ever to be proved the instrument of fraud he firmly believed it to be, nothing could change the fact that it had placed Francesca in a position to be courted by a man in the moderate if adequate circumstances of Rodney Manship without risk of his being rated a fortune hunter.

And so eventually he dozed off, quite satisfied that, when all was said and done, he really owed Angelo a vast debt of gratitude for being a damned scoundrel. . . .

Madame Farusi proved to be one of those handsome, amiable and accomplished women of the world, abundant of person, and an apparently inexhaustible reservoir of vitality, who are so often the possessors of extraordinary voices. Perhaps predisposed in his favour, she seemed to take a liking to Rodney at sight, and although she would eat little or nothing, since she was to sing that night, with rare tact and good nature succeeded in making the excellent dinner she had ordered a more cheerful one than it had seemed reasonable to hope it would be.

It was barely ended when she was obliged to leave her guests; and Rodney came back from closing the living-room door behind the lady to find Francesca standing at one of the windows, pensively gazing down at the prospect of Park Avenue by night, studded with fixed lights like incandescent pearls and haunted by scampering files of motor cars that, with their dim lamps, made one think of great, ungainly fireflies doomed by fatal sorcery to

pursue one another upon those unvarying rounds through all eternity.

"My New York!" the girl murmured softly. "I've always loved it so, I can hardly bear the thought of leaving it."

Something disagreeable happened to the orderly routine of Rodney's heart action; and he wondered dully if his voice had as queer a sound in her hearing as in his.

"Are you thinking of that? Must you?"

"I don't know, I'm not sure. It's one of the things I want you to help me decide." Francesca left the window and found a chair, motioning to Rodney to take one nearby. "Everything has changed so suddenly, I'm just beginning to realize I've got to decide what to do with my life. Nella Farusi wants me to go to England with her when she finishes her concert engagements here—that's next week—and it might be the wisest thing."

"Oh, I hope not!"

The exclamation of desperate sincerity won a glimpse of her shadowy smile.

"But I haven't much money now, you know, Mr. Manship; and money goes farther over there. And then I have a little property inherited from my mother, a house in London that I could live in and so save rent. My mother's people live near London, and they're most charming and seem very fond of me; so I wouldn't be quite friendless. You see, there's every reason why I ought to go but—I don't want to."

"Heaven knows I don't want you to! If I had my way, you'd stay here and fight that will to a finish."

She shook her head slowly. "No; I couldn't do that."

"You mean you won't. But you're wrong to countenance such a barefaced swindle."

"You really believe it's a swindle?"

"No one will ever be able to make me believe it isn't—that your father could change his mind so radically in such a short time and without any provocation. First

I'll have to believe your brother isn't a scamp and his lawyer a shyster."

"I understand," Francesca affirmed gently—"how very strange it must seem to you."

"Well! doesn't it to you?"

"Yes, in a way—but perhaps no. You see, I know father was mysteriously called away from home that afternoon, but not where he went; I don't know that he wasn't in Mr. Croce's office and that pressure wasn't brought to bear on him there to induce him to dictate a new will."

"What sort of pressure?"

"That's a question I daren't answer—at present. I can't be sure I'm justified in my suspicions. When I am sure—and some day I shall be—you shall know all about it, Mr. Manship."

"It isn't likely you'll ever find out the truth," Rodney doubted gloomily.

"You think not?"

"Not if you refuse to contest that will. It's fighting that brings rascals out into the open—not letting them have everything their own way."

"But I haven't given up the idea of fighting—only I must fight in my own fashion, with my own weapons. And I haven't begun to fight yet, I'm merely planning my campaign."

"But if you let them probate this alleged will—!"

"You forget it may be genuine; and to lose would be worse than not fighting at all. And then, to me, the will is a minor point, and by not contesting it I may lull the enemy into a false sense of security—give the impression that I'm afraid. But I'm not, Mr. Manship. It wasn't the empty threat of a hysterical woman, the warning I gave Angelo that night. I shall be true to the promise I made my dead father, to find and bring to punishment those whose treachery brought about his death—though it take my lifetime!"

Rodney got up and began to pace the room, frowning.

"I wish you hadn't reminded me," he said. "I hoped—believed—you had forgotten."

"Never."

"But it's madness! You, a girl, a mere child, to set yourself against such desperate criminals as must make up that smuggling ring!"

"I'm not afraid."

"I know you're not. That's what frightens me, precisely what is going to make it such a dangerous business for you."

"I shall succeed," the girl stated with quiet confidence, "and without coming to harm. The right is on my side."

"If the right always prevailed, there'd never be any wrong-doing in this world. Oh! I wish I knew how to persuade you."

"You can't, Mr. Manship—no one can. You mustn't forget I am half Italian. You only waste strength when you try to reason against racial instinct and traditions—just as I'd be wasting mine if I tried to deny my nature. You can help me most by not opposing me."

"God knows I'll help you all I can, in any way you will!" Rodney groaned. Then he stopped short beside her chair and stood staring down at her in patent puzzlement. "But you're going to England!"

"Yes."

He drew a deep breath and his brows cleared. "Then that's all right! You can't run into much danger over there."

"No," she agreed inscrutably; "that is true."

"For the first time I'm glad. A while ago, when you suggested it, I thought there was nothing I wouldn't do, almost, to prevent your going. But now—!"

"You didn't think it wise? But why?"

"It wasn't that, it was because I—" He caught himself up, and shook a fretful head. "I hadn't meant to say anything—this is hardly the time—but I think you un-

derstand what it will mean to me, to have you go away."

With a broken smile the girl lifted a hand to him; and Rodney caught it in both his own.

"As you say, this is not the time. But, dear friend, I do understand . . ."

Gently disengaging her hand, Francesca rose, moved over to an escritoire, and took up a small packet of papers that lay there.

"And now," she said in a voice that tried to be matter-of-fact, "if you don't mind looking these over and telling me just what I must do to leave everything in your hands while I'm away . . ."

XI

TEN days from that day the *Aquitania* sailed, leaving a forlorn Rodney Manship to task all his fortitude of soul with the necessity of carrying on in a world that had of a sudden become a waste of desolating futility; while in her stateroom the girl Francesca sat with dreaming eyes, lonely and wistful amid his roses . . .

Yet never a word of love had breathed between those two, nor any pledge been asked or proffered—perhaps because none was needed. Their understanding must have been complete if tacit, at that time, at all events in so far as it had to do with Rodney Manship, his heart and mind, whose secret his eyes, his accents, the simple devotion of his attitude, had a hundred times betrayed.

As for Francesca, from first to last beyond all telling gracious, sweet and kind, in the end she remained to him what in the beginning she had been, an enigma as inscrutable as exquisite—it may be to herself as well, in the fullness of her preoccupation with that remote and fatal destiny to which she stood self-dedicated.

A test more trying could hardly have been devised. But if Rodney found in work anodyne of a sort for the ache of longing, his heart held constant, he turned from his times of toil to dreams of Francesca as surely and eagerly as a man parched from labour in the fields turns to a rill of running water.

He was, moreover, fortunate in this, that his clientèle as a body was litigiously disposed that winter, or had quarrels forced upon it, or blundered into troubles through sheer stupidity, and so kept him uncommonly busy six days out of seven. And if this pressure of affairs did keep him out of the open air too much, he

reckoned it his salvation, mainly responsible for his failure to commit some act of hopeless asininity—such as hopping aboard the first available steamer for England and making such an unmitigated nuisance of himself over there that simple weariness of spirit would prompt Francesca to send him packing with a flat and final “No!”

So he schooled himself to be content with the few notes that came to him from over the water—notes never lengthy, but always breathing the friendliest spirit, and as a rule compact with news, telling him that Francesca was charmed with her house in London and had settled down in it to spend the winter, with Madame Farusi as her guest; that she had been hospitably entreated by her mother’s relatives; that her health continued to be excellent; and (he read between the lines) that the pain of the wound dealt by the loss of her father was growing less acute, she was learning by degrees to deal with life less on the old rebellious terms than on those of a philosophy generously maturing.

But never a hint of a wish to return, never an enquiry after her brother. . . .

Had it been otherwise, Rodney would have had nothing to report. For all the forebodings voiced by Ritchey, Angelo apparently had lost interest in Rodney from the moment when the latter left the Barocco residence for the last time, in company with Francesca. Since then Rodney had neither seen anything of the boy nor heard from him except indirectly, and this but once.

Unavoidably he had been thrown into some association with Mr. Leo Croce, when the will of Aniello Barocco was probated and the trust fund established to pay Francesca the annuity which should rightly have been Angelo’s only souvenir of his father. But Mr. Croce was seemingly disposed to let bygones be bygones, never raked up Rodney’s challenge of his probity, and was to all appearances cheerfully unaware of, at worst quite unaffected by, that coolness which on Rodney’s part

characterized their relations. An uninstructed observer, indeed, might well have gathered that they were on the best of terms and counted Rodney's stiffness a lamentable defect of temperament, and a poor return for the urbanity of the other.

Notwithstanding, Mr. Croce failed to worm out of Rodney the secret of Francesca's whereabouts, his most ingenious essays being rewarded only with the advice that Rodney would be pleased to forward letters addressed in his care.

It was toward the middle of March when Mr. Croce did Rodney the honour of paying him a surprise call in his office.

"Don't ask you to be glad to see me," he volunteered with a vivid exhibition of teeth—"but I believe you'll overlook the intrusion, Mr. Manship, when you understand the friendly feeling that brings me."

"Indeed?" Rodney replied, but remained standing by his desk.

Unabashed, Mr. Croce helped himself to a chair, deftly adjusted the knees of his trousers to conserve their admirable creasing, and relighted a cigar that had been better dead.

"Yes, indeed," he amiably rejoined, between puffs. "Between you and me and the lamp-post, it isn't always easy to hold my client when somebody gets the wind up him. He isn't a bad sort, don't care what you think, and I can generally make him listen to reason in the long run; but it doesn't do to push the boy too far."

"Very interesting, I'm sure. Is one to understand Mr. Baroque is in a pet about something at present?"

"I'll say he is—never seen him worse. But I'm doing my best and, with a little help from you, I think we can smooth down his bristles before he breaks out and does something"—the teeth gleamed significantly—"he might be sorry for."

"Afraid you've come to the wrong shop, Mr. Croce.

I haven't any moral influence with your client, and I really doubt if he'd take my interference in good part."

The teeth heliographed keen appreciation of this stroke of humour.

"Well! but to get down to cases, Mr. Manship—"

"I'll be obliged," Rodney said, consulting his watch.

"You must understand how intolerable any man of spirit would find this persecution you're subjecting Mr. Baroque to."

"I? Persecuting Angelo Baroque!"

"I don't call that too hard a name for it. Think how you'd feel, shadowed night and day by private detectives. That sort of thing would get on anybody's nerves. My client hasn't got anything to fear or conceal; but the annoyance of it—!"

"Must be most exasperating," Rodney agreed. "But—while I can't say I'm surprised—I give you my word I know nothing about the matter."

Mr. Croce seemed hugely depressed, and pondered this denial solemnly.

"Well!" he concluded—"guess I've got to take your word for it—"

"You're a good guesser, Mr. Croce."

"I suppose it couldn't be possible that your client—"

"Miss Barocco? I think I can answer for her entire ignorance of the business."

"All right; only I hope my client doesn't cut loose and do anything foolish."

"I hope so, too—for his sake. But tell me: Did this notion, that either his sister or I was responsible for his being dogged by detectives, originate with Mr. Baroque?"

"Why! naturally, he thought—"

"What a mean conscience the poor wretch must have."

Fortunately the telephone rang, and Rodney profited by the interruption to enquire politely, as he picked up the instrument: "Anything else I can do for you, Mr. Croce?"

Mr. Croce said there wasn't, and took himself off with a clouded countenance and no farewell flash of teeth at all.

And Rodney made a mental note to look Ritchey up and ask him what he thought about it, first chance he got; being privately satisfied that, if there were any real excuse for Angelo's complaints, the latter must have mistaken plain-clothes men from Police Headquarters for operatives of a private detective agency.

All that one knew of Angelo's tastes and ways, as well as the considered opinion of Detective Sergeant Ritchey, lent plausible colour to that hypothesis.

XII

RECONSIDERING the incident in the light of Ritchey's earnest warning, Rodney inclined to suspect a motive which hadn't shown on the surface of the call Mr. Croce had paid him. It seemed a supposition not too far-fetched, that Angelo, fed up with nursing an unappreciated hate, might be taking cautious preliminary steps toward giving it good satisfaction; though precisely what he had thought to gain through having Croce interview Rodney remained inexplicable.

Still, it seemed only judicious to be on one's guard against a sequel of some sort.

But weeks passed without event, Mr. Croce and his client continued completely quiescent, and nothing happened to remind Rodney of their existence in a less roundabout fashion than receipt of a letter from Francesca, postmarked Florence.

She had left London, she said, to spend a few weeks in Italy with Madame Farusi; her plans for the future were hazy.

Rodney made due acknowledgment to the address she gave; but in those days the international postal service had not yet recovered its pre-War efficiency, and it was no unusual thing for a letter to be six weeks in transit between Italy and the United States; and though the time seemed long, Rodney did his best to be reasonable, and to ease the irk of waiting for Francesca's reply devoted himself to his work more assiduously than ever.

Even more than it loves a lover, this shiftless world loves a worker; and the severest penalty which attaches unto success, which comes only through hard work, is more work. New clients swarmed in the offices of the

diligent and enterprising young attorney-at-law, more than he could comfortably handle; so that he welcomed them for the distraction they afforded him, and cursed them for their everlasting importunity, in one and the same breath.

One of these was a young Irish-American mechanic named MacManus, who had invented a carburetor of revolutionary type which promised to cut gasoline bills in half, and who, falling into the wrong hands, had already been meanly fleeced and was now in a fair way to lose his patents altogether.

Rodney took a fancy to the fellow and, finding that he was desperately hard up, espoused his cause without a retaining fee.

The negotiations dragged as such negotiations will, when neither side is anxious to take its case into court. Winter passed, trailing slush-bedraggled skirts, Spring emerged with smiling April face fresh from the washing rains of March. Days grew warm and evenings long, newspapers dutifully chronicled the annual wrangle about daylight saving, steamers Europe-bound sailed with full passenger-lists, golf-bags were resurrected, country homes came to life; and when, early in May, a premature blanket of heat plus humidity closed down over Town, the six million groaned as one, then sulkily resigned themselves to the promise of a sweltering Summer.

Of a sudden the other side in the MacManus case took fright and made overtures for a settlement. At the close of a day-long conference an agreement was arrived at and the inventor joyfully departed for his home, promising to return at four the next afternoon to get the certified cheque for which Rodney was to exchange certain papers bearing his signature.

The cheque was waiting at the hour appointed, but no MacManus came to claim it. Instead, a woman's voice with a brogue like velvet informed Rodney by telephone that Misther MacMaynus had had an accident, sort of,

and wouldn't be able to lave his bid for several days, docther said; and wouldn't Misther Manship kindly thry and see if he couldn't sind thim the money, because divvle a cint was in the house, and the docther would be after wanting his pay and the landlord his rint.

Rodney promised to see to it in person; but a dinner conference with another client delayed him, so that it was in the dim end of the gloaming that his taxicab put him down in front of an unlovely tenement in the remote hinterland of the upper East Side.

Abstractedly (for some reason he was mooning about Francesca more persistently than usual, that night) he paid off the driver and turned toward the house. Too late it was borne in upon him that he should have kept the conveyance waiting; one would have far to walk before one found another in that part of Town.

His sentimental dreams dissipated by this reflection, he looked about, took stock of the neighbourhood, and realized with some surprise that his life had been so long restricted to walks and ways of the well-to-do, he had almost forgotten New York retained such quarters as this, haunts of poverty, wretchedness, vice, and squalor unrelieved.

From corner to corner of the long cross-town block, unbroken ranks of beetling old-law tenements walled in the street, oozing from every window, door and fire-escape humanity in the raw, less than half-washed, largely half-naked, and wholly unashamed. Sidewalks and roadway teemed with children in the screaming, sticky stage. The air was heavy with heat and the effluvia of garbage-cans that cluttered the curbs, disputing for place with push-carts above which naptha torches belched gusty, lurid flares.

A number of slatternly women, one openly nursing a baby, were huddled in the entrance to the tenement where Rodney's client lived. They made way grudgingly, and when Rodney asked them where to find MacManus

showed him blank eyes or, shaking their heads, responded in tongues that meant nothing to him, though he thought he recognized the sounds of Yiddish and Italian.

Then one called in a man from the sidewalk, a hang-dog lout with the face and carriage of a Parisian Apache; and this one found enough strongly accented English to direct Rodney to the fourth floor back.

Ascending the noisome well of the stairway, his nostrils assailed at every landing by new combinations of odours, Rodney was reminded of a friend, a physician whose early professional days had been spent in ministering to the miseries of tenants of such rookeries, and who asserted that, when called to doctor a new patient, he had never asked his way but smelt it, following his nose to the lair of boiled cabbage, if the name were Irish, or fried fish if it were Jewish, or garlic if it were Italian.

The man MacManus lay abed in a veritable cocoon of bandages which, however, could not altogether hide twinkling Irish eyes and the fetching smile with which he recounted his misadventure of the previous night. It seemed that, coming home elated, he had stopped in at the corner, "a dirrty Wop joint," to celebrate the victory which Rodney had won for him with the *vin du pays*, a concoction known by the simple name of "hootch." In perfectly natural sequence, as MacManus understood it, there had been a bit of a shindig, from which he had emerged not without honour if in the battered state visible to the caller.

"They're a mane lot, thim Wops," his wife commented—"an' sorra th' daay we was iver so poor we had to move into this livin' nist av thim!"

But now they were poor no longer, and it was all thanks to Rodney. . . .

He left as quickly as he could in decency, to escape their overpowering gratitude, and was half-way down the last flight of stairs before he fancied something sinister in the changed aspect of the lower hallway.

The women who had cluttered the entrance were gone. In their stead Rodney saw half a dozen young ruffians lounging against the walls, cigarettes drooping from loose-lipped mouths, faces of unwholesome pallor all expressionless as silently they watched Rodney come down to them.

He knew a little thrill of alarm, but it was something momentary, he shook it off with a shrug of self-contempt that he should be so facile a prey to imaginary terrors. Even assuming that he had anything to fear from Angelo's hostility, how should the latter have guessed that Rodney would be in that evil neighbourhood at that hour of that particular night?

The supposition was too absurd . . .

But the group in the doorway made no offer to let him pass, and when he touched the nearest sleeve and uttered a pleasant "Beg pardon," his voice was drowned out by a snarl from the far side of the knot.

"That's him! Kill the bastard!"

A heavy blow on the chest sent him staggering back beyond the foot of the staircase. He caught at the newel-post to save himself a fall, and in the same breath saw the pack closing in.

And then he was fighting for his very life.

XIII

NEVER an instant, its victim reckoned, was the issue of that onslaught in question. His assailants had hardly been in character if it had entered their heads to give him a fighting chance. They were six or seven to one, and on their own chosen ground; while the back part of the hallway into which Rodney was carried by their first savage rush, the nucleus of a writhing knot of bodies, was terra incognita to him, a simple, dark cul-de-sac. He could only do his utmost to give as good as he got, and this in full confidence that, the better his success in repaying punishment with punishment, the more sure he might feel that the end would come with a cold kiss of steel.

The business went forward in a strange sort of silence. For a little there was a rumour, that could not have carried to the street, of broken and hurried breathing, dull mutters of rage, scuffling of feet, with now and again a smart crack of fist on flesh. Then abruptly weight of numbers carried the day, Rodney fell heavily against a door, and instantly drew up his knees to protect his abdomen, and with crossed forearms guarded his head. In the next few seconds he suffered enough from vicious kicks and grinding heels to make him sick and faint, so that, perceiving his plight as hopeless, he grew dully impatient for the time when unconsciousness would numb his pain . . .

But his persecution met with a check as unexpected to its authors as to their prey. The door opened against which Rodney lay in a huddle, a sharply imperative voice saluted the pack, and the assault was suspended as somebody strode across the body of the half-conscious man

and began a harangue in accents somehow remotely familiar—a voice that one would surely know if one were not too far gone to make the requisite effort of memory.

Neither was what it said intelligible, for the tongue was not English.

Ungentle hands seized Rodney's arms and hoisted him to his feet. Winded, spent, trembling, he rested in half-daze against the open door, held up on either side by two of his late adversaries—and face to face with Angelo Baroque.

Sardonic triumph painted broadly upon his handsome mask of a young faun, Angelo held himself with the jaunty carriage of a conqueror, though he had taken no hand in the attack and, unlike the others, of whom every one showed some sign of damage endured, was immaculate in respect of the shouting smartness of his attire of a leader among gangmen.

Seeing recognition flicker in Rodney's half-glazed stare, Angelo spat an Italian epithet into the face of the American, then with a spirited tilt of the head and a curling lip cast round the ring of degraded countenances for sycophantic applause. It came in a break of grim chuckles. Somebody questioned him, apparently in surprise, and he replied with a phrase or two in a derisive key that won another laugh.

Then with a change to truculent decision, he addressed his henchmen more brusquely, and wound up with an order to the men who were holding Rodney's arms. Immediately they released him, and dropped back, grinning in anticipation. Angelo stepped close, gave the American a glimpse of his scornful smile, and with a violent hand thrust him, reeling, across the threshold, to trip, go prone to the floor, and strike his head against the leg of an iron bedstead.

Behind him the door crashed as it were consciousness going out in a clap of thunder . . .

He came to himself, with no knowledge of the lapse

of time, staring groggily up at a gas-jet whose fan, of bluish flame edged with yellow, was roaring and whistling directly overhead.

Cognizance of his surroundings was something that came in details, each gained at cost of augmented agony in a throbbing head.

Face and hair dripping wet, coat and waistcoat unbuttoned, collar and necktie missing, the pillow damp beneath his head, Rodney lay upon a bed in a room whose atmosphere was close and foul with unclean ghosts of dead cookery. A wall coloured with bilious distemper held the dark oblong of a doorway at the foot of the bed.

Unable to see more without moving his head, when he essayed this Rodney groaned aloud and was blinded by pain that wildly danced, a living flame, within his skull.

But presently it subsided, vision cleared, and he perceived that there was a second door in the wall near the head of the bed, where Angelo was standing, in a pose of strained and apprehensive attention, with an ear to the panels.

Catching Rodney's perplexed eye, the boy frowned, but curiously, a frown of worry rather than the scowl of hatred which experience had taught one to expect of him. Then he shook his head slightly and signed for silence with a finger to his lips.

Utterly confounded, Rodney made no stir, but followed in deepening wonder the actions of Angelo as that one, after a long pause in listening, nodded in apparent satisfaction, swung away to the foot of the bed, and called urgently, yet in guarded tones, to somebody in the room beyond.

As he darted back to his former stand, turned the key in the lock and unfastened a chain-bolt, a woman entered from the farther room, a creature of mature figure with a shawl caught so closely over her head that her features were not visible.

She went quickly to Angelo, who had cautiously opened the door and was peering out. Evidently reassured by his reconnaissance, with a parting mutter of instruction, he let the woman pass through to the hallway, then reclosed and bolted the door.

Turning to the bed, with a gesture of impatience he threw off the golf cap which had shadowed his features, sank upon his knees, and caught one of Rodney's hands tenderly between both his own.

"Mr. Manship! Are you in pain? What can I do for you? I am so, so sorry!"

Hearing that voice of music, staring up into that face solicitous and compassionate which hung above his own, Rodney was able to articulate one word only—

"Francesca!"

XIV

“YES,” breathed the girl—“it is I. But not so loud.” She cast a glance of misgiving toward the door and, resting cool fingers lightly on Rodney’s lips, listened intently for a moment. But apparently she heard nothing alarming, for she was quick to return her pitiful interest to the man whose life she had saved.

“You are suffering. Tell me what to do!”

“It’s nothing,” Rodney grunted—“I mean, nothing much. Pretty well beaten up but—I guess—no bones broken. Let’s see.”

He set his teeth and with determination roused on an elbow. Though he was successful in keeping back the groan, the girl saw his eyes narrow and the muscles of his jaw grow tense; and she gave a cry of sympathy. But Manship waved aside her offer to let him back again upon the pillow, and swung his feet down to the floor. After which he found it necessary to hold his skull together with both hands for a while, lest it rend itself asunder.

The girl left him to fetch water from the adjoining room. When she came back, Rodney was sitting up and gingerly experimenting.

“Arms and legs a bit bruised,” he reported with a wry smile—“but apparently intact—likewise ribs. Guess that crack on the head was the worst, after all.”

“And my fault. I’m so sorry, but I had to—because they believed I was Angelo.”

“Couldn’t know I’d take a tumble and hit my fool head on that blessed bed,” Rodney defended her. “Besides—I’d ’ve been disappointed, too—if you hadn’t played up, just then.” He gulped from the glass she held

to his lips, and felt better. "Sure you're not Angelo?" he demanded, looking up. "If you're Francesca, then I must be in Italy. How come?"

"I can't tell you now, there isn't time. Later. I've been back almost a week. As soon as you feel strong enough, we must be going. Every minute here is dangerous. Angelo is sure to learn too soon . . . Do you feel able?"

"Do my best." Rodney caught hold of the foot of the bed and pulled himself up to a standing position. For a moment he swayed with eyes shut, then steadied. "That's better," he announced, blinking. "Good old constitution—tough and rugged—stands a lot. Where do we go from here?"

"Wait—I'll have to show you. We daren't leave by way of the street."

Francesca extinguished the gas, found Rodney's hand, and drew him through the darkness into the other room, where the shape of a window was visible as a dim rectangle in the mirk. From this they looked out into a glimmering well of night, spangled with lighted windows, laced with clothes-lines. Then the girl quietly lifted the lower sash, letting in air that might by courtesy be termed fresh, with sounds of nocturnal revelry, squalling of infants, harmony of an accordeon and guitar, cacophony of a domestic free-for-all in one of the neighbouring flats.

The iron platform of a fire-escape ran level with the window-sill. "We can drop from this to the back-yard," the girl's whisper advised; "then—I know a way. Think you can manage—?"

"Anything to get you out of this hole. I'm all right. Let's go!"

The lithe body in man's clothing slipped out upon the grating and disappeared. Rodney followed less nimbly, breathing hard. There was one spot in his ribs, where a particularly vicious kick had got home, the hurt of which, magnified by every movement, was purely hellish.

Otherwise he felt somewhat better, more clear of head—though mystified no end.

By means of a permanent iron ladder running through a break in the platform, they were able to let themselves down till, hanging by their hands from the lowermost rung, their feet were not far from the ground. But it was quite dark, and Rodney, who had no means of knowing how great the drop would be, was agreeably disappointed in the outcome, if more shaken up, even so, than he liked.

The tenement yard was a simple black hole, for generations a common catch-all, and there was only a dull refraction from overhead to show the way. However, Francesca seemed sure of her ground; and Rodney, clinging blindly to her hand, was led through a gap in a fence into another backyard, then into another and yet others, so that he had lost count and sense of direction entirely when at length they sped through a dark malodorous basement and emerged—like divers coming up for air—to the lights and comparative fragrance of an open street.

Here the girl caught Rodney's arm and hustled him relentlessly. Though she knew every uncalculated movement meant pain to him, there was no help for it. Her murmur warned him that they must not think themselves safe anywhere in that quarter; every moment they were in danger of running into Angelo or some one of his fellows. Rodney protested feebly, asking what of the police. To this Francesca replied with a short laugh; luck alone could save them, she asserted, a fair turn of luck that would enable them to make good their rendezvous with Marcella. That name Rodney repeated stupidly. With a hint of impatience Francesca replied that Marcella was the woman who had left the room shortly after he had regained consciousness: "I sent her to find a taxicab and have it waiting at a safe distance."

It was proved presently that the old nurse had not

failed them. In the shadow of the Third Avenue Elevated they came upon the vehicle. Marcella, who had been loitering in conversation with the driver, moved aside as Francesca conducted Rodney to the door, stopped, and held out her hand with an admirably masculine gesture.

"Well!" she said cheerily, in the very voice of Angelo—"glad to 've seen you—and good night!"

Rodney eyed her in complete perplexity.

"What—?"

In a lowered voice the girl added almost angrily: "Don't you see that lot across the street watching us? *I* don't know who they are. Please go!"

A glance confirmed the fact that they were being favoured with the inquisitive interest of a group of loafers in the doorway of a saloon on the opposite corner—one of those mysterious survivals of our time, a common groggery which persisted in flaunting an apparently not unprosperous existence in the face of a community pledged to absolute prohibition.

But to Rodney it didn't matter that they were observed; nothing mattered but the fact that the woman he loved, the woman whom he had believed to be many thousands of miles away, had strangely come back into his life, in the guise and garb of a handsome if dangerous young blackguard, and—having saved him from being beaten to death—was now coolly proposing not only to dismiss him with a handshake of everyday but to return, alone, to that deadly slum.

"Are you mad?" he muttered.

"I think you are," she retorted in the same pitch. "Haven't you realized yet what danger—?"

"Do you imagine I will leave you in it?"

"If you don't—"

"Not a step without you," he firmly interrupted. "If you must go back to—that—I go with you."

"How dare you interfere!" she blazed.

"How dared you, a while ago? Now I owe my very life to you. Don't think you can so easily evade that obligation."

For a moment, braving the tempest of her eyes, he wondered if this might not be Angelo, after all. . . .

"It's no go," he persisted doggedly. "I don't leave you here—that's flat."

"O well!"—the shift of tone and manner was both instantaneous and bewildering; and now again it was the voice of Angelo that carried clearly to the group across the street—"don't mind if I do. Sure! I'll ride with you a ways."

And with no more ado the girl swung open the door of the cab and climbed in. Rodney, delaying only to give the chauffeur the address of his club, followed—incidentally remarking that Marcella had discreetly vanished.

XV

BUT the show of cheerful acquiescence with which Francesca had given lasted no longer than was needed to let Rodney shut the cab door and drop into the seat by her side. Then in the broken and fugitive illumination of the street lights he saw that her face was averted, revealing only the sweet round of her nearer cheek. She had drawn back into her corner, too, as if to get as far away from him as possible, and a hand resting upon one trousered knee was clenched into a tight fist.

"Francesca!" he said; but she paid no heed.

He bent forward to look into her face. The mouth was sullen, the brows were level above eyes like sultry pools.

"Francesca—!"

All at once she turned on him.

"Oh! do be still. You've done your best to spoil everything. Now for pity's sake! let me be—let me think out, if I can, some way to make good the damage you've done."

"I! What have I done that any man in my shoes wouldn't? Could I sneak off home and save my own skin and leave you to blunder madly back into that danger?"

"There was no danger."

He blankly parrotted: "No danger!"

"For you, yes—but none for me. If you had gone when I begged you, nothing could have happened to me."

"But not five minutes ago you were warning me to look for a clash with Angelo any minute—"

"Warning you—not myself. What have I to fear from that one?"

"You know him better than I do, but you can't expect me to count on his never forgetting you're his twin sister when you hound him the way you do—"

"Hound *him*?"

"With your vow of vengeance upon the heads of those who were responsible for your father's death. That's what you're doing—that's why you've come back without letting anybody know, and buried yourself in that unholy tenement district—isn't it? What other reason—?"

"You seem to believe it was Angelo—"

"I've nothing to go on but suspicions you yourself put into my head."

"I'm not sure. No matter what may seem suspicious, I can't believe that my own brother, my father's son—"

"Still, you won't rest till you know the truth."

"No."

"And if it should turn out it was Angelo . . ."

After a moment she said shortly: "Please don't ask me."

"Very well; but in that case, don't ask me to believe you'd show him any mercy, or he'd expect any at your hands."

The girl maintained an obdurate silence.

"Francesca: give up this mad adventure!"

"You don't know what you're asking."

"I'm asking you to come to your senses"—she laughed scornfully—"not to go on risking your life for a wild revenge that would turn to ashes in your grasp if you should ever realize it."

"It's my life—"

"Not altogether. it's mine as well. You're life to me—and everything else—because I love you."

She turned her face fully to him; but though all his heart was in the eyes with which he searched, he could read nothing in her look, guess nothing of her mind from the shadowy and enigmatic countenance she had to show him by that fitful play of light and shade.

In reproach she cried: "Oh! why did you say that?"

"Forgive me. You've known it a long time—that I loved you—and so have I, ever since I first saw you."

"You shouldn't have said it—!"

"Why not? It's true, it's the reason why I can't help but worry and pray for you—why I must reason with you, no matter if it does make you angry—"

"I am not angry," she said, and let a hand rest upon the back of his. "I was vexed, a little, because I saw my plans going wrong; though all along I knew it wasn't your fault, and that you couldn't be reasonable, let me have my own way without dispute—you being you and, as you say, in love with me. Forgive me my ill temper—Rodney—and don't for a moment think I don't know what honour you have done me."

"But it is you who do me an honour when you let me love you."

For the first time in this talk, shyly, wistfully, she smiled a little.

"Why! I'm afraid I can't stop you—can I? If I could, I suppose I ought to. At least, I shouldn't encourage you."

"Meaning," he said brokenly, "there's no hope for me?"

"Meaning I have no right to permit any man to care for me, so long as my mind is—as it is. I suppose an avenging Nemesis"—she smiled again—"isn't in the right way of living to have a sweetheart—is she?—the life work of a conscientious Nemesis being an extra hazardous occupation and making her a poor risk both as an insurance and as a matrimonial prospect."

"I love you," he groaned—"and you laugh at me!"

"No, Rodney; I'm not laughing, just trying to smile a little, to wink back the tears. You see, you—you've made me so happy I rather want to cry."

Rodney sat up suddenly, but she drew away her hand

and shrank back into her corner with a small gesture of pleading.

"You care—whether I love you or not?" he incredulously cried.

She nodded with starry eyes. "It's sweet to be loved by a man one can like and respect," she said. "Yes, my dear, I care—too much, perhaps, for my own peace of mind—not enough, perhaps, to make you as happy as you deserve—but enough, at least, to beg a great favour of you, and to make you a promise in return."

"Tell me . . ."

"Promise first not to make love to me again till I give you leave."

"How can you ask that? How can I promise—?"

"Perhaps it won't be long, Rodney; only until I'm free to answer you. That's what I promise you in return—not to keep you waiting longer than I must."

"Free? How are you bound?"

"By my vow to my dead father. When I promised to find his murderers, I promised not to love till I had done so." Rodney made inarticulate noises of expostulation. "No!" she insisted, "but I had to. You see, even then I knew there was danger I might let myself be weakened in my purpose. Even now I am forgetting!"

She bent forward to peer out of the window.

Several minutes since the cab had turned down Fifth Avenue. The dark bulk of the Metropolitan Museum by night was now some distance ahead. The girl nodded thoughtfully at sight of it.

"And now I want you to be generous to me again, Rodney. I want you to drop me in front of the Metropolitan. I can get another taxi there."

"But why?"

"Two reasons: I don't trust this driver—I don't know anything about him. It was a risk I had to run, to let Marcella pick up the first cab she could find. You told him to drive to your club; you can discharge him there



“I’m waiting your explanation,” she said coldly. Page 92

and go on to your rooms. But I don't want him to know where I go."

"Or me, either, I infer."

"Or you, either—in this instance."

"You're going back there?"

"Be kind, don't insist on my answering."

"I can't let you—"

"But if I promise you, Rodney, wherever I'm going, it isn't into danger?"

"How can I be sure?"

"Because I'll make you another promise: I shan't be much more than an hour. Then I will meet you, wherever you say, and explain everything—all that you've found so mystifying. . . . Isn't that a fair bargain?"

"If I could trust you to take care of yourself!"

"Why! don't you think I've proved I can? Besides, in the end, you'll have to, you know." She laughed a little, not defiantly, but with a note of fondness. "You can't kidnap me. It isn't being done this season."

"I don't know—I've got a mind to try."

"You'd find it dreadfully embarrassing, don't you think? Where could you take me? Not to your club, because I'm not what I seem. Not to a hotel—no safe and sane hotel will take in a young woman disguised as a man. Not to the police station—because I just won't go!"

She met his gloomy and distrustful stare with a twinkle of light malice.

"But don't be downcast, Mr. Manship; you shall surely see me again tonight. You have my word."

She tapped sharply on the glass behind the driver. The taxi swerved toward the curb, and slowed down.

Outwitted and grasping at straws, "Where will you meet me, then?" Rodney demanded.

"You'll be home in the course of an hour?" It was the voice of Angelo again, as the cab stopped and the girl jumped out: "I'll give you a ring and make a date."

XVI

PREOCCUPATION with the mystery and magic of that romantic meeting and its sequel, Francesca's frank confession that she was anything but indifferent to his sentimental interest, anxiety for her welfare in that dark hazard upon which she had embarked so lightly on leaving him, resentful admiration of the high-handed way with which she had overruled all his efforts to turn her from her wilful course—these kept self-consciousness in eclipse so profound that the taxicab was at a standstill in front of his club before Rodney remembered the grievous dilapidation of his person.

And he had faithfully promised Francesca, in view of the unlikely but still possible contingency that this driver might be one of Angelo's allies, not to go on to his rooms without changing cabs!

Rodney groaned "O the devil!"—faltering on the step and viewing the club portals in utterest dismay.

But the door-porter was at his elbow and eyeing him with amazement there was no disguising. Too late to draw back now: the story of his appearance in this shocking state in any event was bound to spread.

Rodney thrust a bill into the hand of the porter, told him to pay off the taxi, and turning up his coat-collar round an indecently naked neck, trotted into the club.

As hastily as might be he delivered himself into the hands of one of the club valets; but to do so had to pass through the public rooms and court the supercilious eyebrows of the steady-paced member and the more rude amusement of the low-minded, neither of whom could be persuaded to see in his appearance anything but the

sad outcome of an only too successful adventure with boot-liquor.

While the damage to his garments was being in some measure repaired, he sent a request to the door-porter to keep an eye peeled and let him know if the cab that had brought him seemed disposed to tarry in the offing.

Word came back that it had already picked up a fellow club-member and whisked him off to an address on the upper West Side. Which might have seemed gratifying if Rodney hadn't, in the meantime, reminded himself that Angelo knew perfectly well where he lived and, consequently, where to look for him at such times as decent, law-abiding bodies ought to be at home.

In other words, he had indulged Francesca's request to no conceivable profit, but much to the contrary, at the cost of giving his fair young reputation a most lamentable black eye.

Rare temper winged his heels as he strode homeward, but was instantly diverted when, on entering his rooms, he heard the grumble of the telephone bell. He fairly flung himself upon the neck of the instrument.

"Mr. Manship? Mr. Baroque speaking. Remember me?"

The half-surly, half-truculent mockery of those accents was so well-remembered and so true that Rodney's heart stood still in apprehension, and momentarily suspended breathing rendered his response to a degree incoherent. But then he heard Francesca laugh quietly, and all was right with the world once more—or as nearly right as it could be while one had no hope of delivering the girl from the dominion of her *idée fixe*.

"What's the matter? Does it always upset you to hear the voice of one of your gentlemen friends?"

"You frightened me," Rodney explained simply. "For an instant I thought—"

"I'm sorry." There was real contrition in her natural voice, but it was mixed with amusement. "I only wanted

to warn you I'm apt to be delayed, I don't know quite how long; but you're not to fret or do anything foolish. Nothing can happen to me."

"But you promised—!"

"I haven't reneged, Mr. Manship, and won't—more than this much: I don't think it would be wise for me to meet you anywhere in public, I'll come to see you instead. Does that shock you? But it's perfectly proper for you to receive young men of your acquaintance even at midnight or thereabouts— isn't it? I shan't be later."

All Rodney's remonstrances spent their force vainly against a lightly bantering rejoinder to the effect that Francesca was sorry she had so little time to spare, otherwise she would be only too glad to argue out the question with him. To which an airy *au revoir* was added, a receiver clicked into its hook, and Rodney found himself reading an impassioned screed to an unresponsive wire.

So there was nothing to be done about it, nothing but grin and bear it. Nevertheless he kept his mind busy while taking a hot soak and a cold shower to ease the aches in bones and muscles, revolving a dozen plans to come between the girl and her will without calling down her resentment upon his head. The most promising he endeavoured to put into effect after dressing; but it failed of immediate fruit because Police Headquarters, addressed by telephone, pretended to know nothing whatever about the whereabouts of Detective Sergeant Ritchey of the Narcotic Squad. Which seemed most exasperating, since one assumed—from the complaint which Mr. Leo Croce had filed on behalf of his client, to the effect that the latter was being haunted by detectives—that Ritchey was probably keeping himself tolerably well informed concerning the interests and activities of Angelo Baroque.

It was long after midnight before the steady aggravation of anxiety was relieved by a brisk thrill of the doorbell heralding the introduction to the living-room of a

devil-may-care young rip, with a golf-cap down over one eye, a cigarette drooping from the underlip, the easy slouch of a thorough man of the underworld, and a notable irradiation of self-complacence. An apparition so foreign to those disastrous shapes with which Rodney's forebodings had been peopled, that he was stricken momentarily dumb and stood gaping like a half-wit, still holding the hall door.

Remarking this oversight, his caller gently disengaged the knob from Rodney's grasp, shut the door, and made sure that its patent lock had latched.

"Good of you to sit up so late for me, old thing," said the voice of Angelo as it must have been with those whom that one liked—if, indeed, one were warranted in assuming Angelo had ever liked anybody but himself. "Hope you haven't minded. Anyhow, it's no good your getting smoky, because I couldn't help myself: business is business, you know."

The impudence of this address recollected Rodney's wits from their wool-gathering.

"You young imp!" he cried with a laugh that did not quite succeed in veneering indignation. His impulsive hands clipped the shoulders of that graceless, charming figure. "If I gave you half you deserve—!"

"But you won't," the voice of Francesca stated. "Please, Mr. Manship!"

With gentle dignity she freed her shoulders and turned away, removing the golf-cap.

"Oh, I'm sorry!" Rodney contritely cried.

Instantly she gave him again her wistful and cajoling smile.

"It's all right, Rodney—all my fault. I shouldn't have teased you. . . . But what's the matter?"

He was in a stare of horror.

"Your hair!" he groaned—"your beautiful hair!"

With a rueful moue Francesca passed a hand over the

closely cropped hair that so well revealed the fine formation of her head.

"It is too bad," she confessed. "I howled like fun the first time I saw myself in a mirror, afterwards. But it had to be done, it would have been fatal otherwise. . . . Never mind!" she chirped up in a twinkling. "I had a noble wig made out of my shorn sacrifice; and this will grow like mad, anyway, when I can let it."

But Rodney wagged a mournful head and would not be comforted.

"It was criminal!" he declared. "If you could go to such lengths as that, how can I hope that you will ever listen to me?"

"Ah! but you are mistaken, and unfair, too." She made a demure face. "Didn't I listen prettily to you in the cab tonight? And answer you back with almost unmaidenly directness, too? And all when I knew it was wrong, I had no right to! No, no!" With a gesture of gay but firm denial she halted an impetuous movement. "I'm not inviting renewal of hostilities, sir—our armistice stands. O be kind to me, Rodney! be generous. You know from what happened tonight how hard it is for me, how weak I am and infirm of purpose—when it's you!"

Disarmed and silenced, he shrugged.

"Besides," Francesca told him in a flash of triumph, "it's too late, dear friend. All the good will in the world could not save me now. This very night I have taken the final, fatal step, I've crossed my Rubicon; I too have become initiate and taken the vows, put myself on a plane of equality with Angelo; I'm his comrade now, his peer; he can't deny or dislodge me, he can't breathe one little whisper to betray me except at peril of his life."

"Good Heavens!" Heedless of her prohibition, Rodney in a stride covered the space between them and caught both her hands into an agitated grasp. "What new insanity—?"

"Only what I've been intending all along. I could have done nothing if I hadn't, my hands would have remained forever impotent, my eyes blind. Don't think I've gone to all this trouble for anything so childish as to play a game with Angelo or masquerade as him. It was graver business, Rodney. . . . But let me go. I promised to tell you everything; and so I will when you give me back my hands and let me make myself comfortable."

By this time Rodney knew his book too well to oppose her.

"As you will," he said, releasing her. "But I hardly need say I'm worried sick . . ."

"You are a dear; and I'd be an ungrateful wretch if I failed to keep my word. You shall know all, sir; but it's an awfully long story and . . . Please, Rodney, I'm frightfully hungry. Isn't there some place near—?"

"Quite near. You won't have to leave this room, in fact, if you'll be content with coffee and sandwiches, things like that. When you telephoned you'd be late, I foresaw this moment, so called up the club and had them send over a cold supper."

"You do think of everything—don't you?" the girl cried, gazing enraptured upon the little table set for two which Rodney disclosed by folding back a screen.

"Yes," he admitted, with a becoming absence of false modesty—"I do. That is to say, I think all the time of you, and you're everything . . ."

Some time later he replaced the screen in front of a devastated table, and looked round to find that Francesca established just out of range of the light cast by the shaded study lamp, where she was lounging in a chair whose roominess made her slight, boyish body seem all the slighter.

He drew up a chair to face her.

"Now!" he firmly reminded her.

With her pensive smile of a child, she came out of a

fit of abstraction, nodded thoughtfully, and then, focusing a reminiscent gaze upon far distances, began a quiet recountal of adventures that—the more by contrast with her simple and engaging manner—seemed to Rodney as fantastic as anything in the Thousand and One Nights.

XVII

PRECISELY when the first Barocco became an adherent of the Camorra is a question clouded with impenetrable mists of unwritten history. It probably wasn't a great while after the Society came into being, in the bad old Bourbon days of the early Nineteenth Century, when it was generated by spontaneous combustion, so to speak, in the festering sties of Neapolitan prisons. For when the Bourbons were functioning at the peak of their really superb efficiency as despots, the prisons of Naples were simple, swarming pounds wherein political suspects of every grade, from every stratum of society, were huddled indiscriminately with the foulest offscourings of the city's sinks and stews.

Condemn any man, no matter how fine his grain, to the society of criminals for months or years on end, for some trivial offense or for none at all, for nothing more venal than the misfortune of being under suspicion of harbouring treasonable sentiments toward a government guilty of heinous crimes against the people; and that man will leave prison, if not a manufactured criminal, at least saturate with criminal sympathies.

Thus in Naples few can boast that their families have not had, at some time during the last century, some form of affiliation, however indirect or secret, with the Camorra. It is debatable whether there were any who did not pay it tribute in one form or another.

Now it is to be borne in mind that, though Barocco is an old name and an honoured one in Naples, a good percentage of its wearers in every generation had been born "baroque," in mutiny against every law of God and man. Not one but many a cadet of the house must have

suffered incarceration as an enemy of the State, under Bourbon rule; and native predisposition for the forbidden side must have made their spirits fertile soil for the seed of Camorrist doctrines. The memory of their oldest runs not to the contrary of that time when some member of the family was not involved in the intrigues of the Camorra, hand in glove with one or the other of its branches, the Camorra alta, "the swell mob," or the Camorra bassa, the primary organization of thieves, panders, and assassins.

So it must have seemed not unnatural that the "baroque" half of the twins, Liborio and Aniello, should enlist in the Camorra and ultimately involve his brother in its machinations. And though it may have been that Liborio, always the "man of spirit," at first aspired to nothing more reprehensible than the prestige of fellowship with those tremendous bloods, the Camorra elegante (or alta) it was inevitable that he should eventually gravitate into the Camorra bassa, that fundamental structure of banded criminality wherein the real strength of the order lay.

A young man of ability and intelligence, with a way of his own that made him friends and attracted a train of sycophants, he became in time a figure of high stature in any company of Camorristi, "a coming man," consequently one to be reckoned with in the esteem of those who held the sinister symbols of the society's vast and secret power.

A little distance into the mazes of the Mala Vita Aniello followed his twin, unwillingly and with such cumulative repugnance as made him presently pull up and refuse to go farther even for Liborio's sake. Thus far he had come in the hope of reclaiming his brother; the bonds of affection were strong between the two, in those days, there was nothing Aniello would not have done to save Liborio from himself and from his second self as well, that shadow of evil which had fastened to

his heels, like a shape of black sorcery he might never hope to outfoot, the shadow of the Camorra. But however little the extent of his venture into the labyrinth, it had been enough to give Aniello glimpses of farther reaches where ulcerous corruption walked naked and unspeakable. And sickened, he drew back.

It was never related to the girl Francesca, when she had grown mature enough to have the confidence of her father, what happened to drive Liborio out of Italy, whether he had sinned against Society and the State till even the power of the Camorra could no more protect him, or whether he had come to be considered a dangerous rival by the ringleaders of the organization. Whatever it was, Liborio found it convenient and judicious to leave Naples between two suns, never to return. As a matter of course, Aniello went with him.

They had a little money between them, not much, but enough to bring them to New York and set them up in a small way of business as second-hand dealers on the lower East Side. They prospered, and speedily grew out of those dingy and drab beginnings into their antique business of fair repute on Madison Avenue. But they did not outgrow the Camorra or outdistance its influence. In this world one does not do that, unless one seeks out some spot where there are no Italians of Neapolitan blood or connections. Even so, one is never safe; the arm of the Camorra is long, its memory even longer; its apostates are singularly few, this side of the grave.

In New York the brothers found themselves in the second Italian city of the world, a city whose population boasted a large element of Neapolitan origin with a flourishing overseas branch of the Society of Camorra, scarcely less powerful in its sphere of influence and activity, if measurably more discreet in the application of its power, than the parent body.

In America, indeed, the name Camorra was little used, the Society was content to pass loosely as the "Black

Hand"; and if many of its crimes were attributed to its sister society of Sicily, the Mafia, it endured such injustice without complaint.

Liborio in his new life, so far as Francesca knew, made no effort to keep clear of the toils of those associations which had made him a virtual outlaw from Italy; but—as if experience had really taught him something—was sedulous to take no hand in the administration of the Camorra in America, was content passively to play its supple servant. And it is probable that the business of Baroque Brothers profited heavily thereby, from its very beginnings. Francesca was satisfied that, even in its earliest phase, the firm had served the local Camorristi as a thieves' fence.

Though this was against the will of Aniello, he was wise enough not to remonstrate with Liborio outside the walls of their home. And if bitter quarrels grew out of Liborio's persistence in holding to his criminal courses, this last was not one to betray to the Camorra the infidelity of his brother. He knew what would happen should Aniello become suspect, and had no wish to prove that the ancient Italian superstition about twins dying in the same hour would hold good in an alien land.

The last bond of sympathy between the brothers was severed when they fell in love with the same woman. She chose Aniello; and though they continued to live under the same roof the old affection was gone forever, only that curious psychic rapport remained which made the twins ill at ease when denied each other's company for any length of time.

By degrees Aniello retired from active participation in the management of the antique business, leaving everything to Liborio, who withdrew more and more into the shop as into a shell, till he even slept there, on a makeshift bed behind a screen, and saw his brother's family only at meal times. But Francesca remembered how, if Aniello failed to visit the shop in the course of any morn-

ing or afternoon, Liborio would come moodily prowling through the house till he found his brother and made sure all was well with him; whereupon, as a rule, he would return without exchanging a word with Aniello.

It was subsequent to her father's marriage, or Francesca was mistaken, that Liborio began to make the shop a general depôt for the receipt and distribution of drugs smuggled from Italy by colleagues in the Camorra.

The futile protests which Aniello uttered against this practice served only to widen the estrangement. Liborio only sneered, serenely continued in his chosen way. And Aniello could do nothing but await the fall of the inevitable.

He was so sure it was merely a question of time before exposure would bring down retribution that (he once told Francesca) he was relieved when Death took from him the wife whom he had loved with a reverence approaching adoration. At the worst, she was spared the disgrace that was sure to come, and the pain of learning that her husband had all his life long been the brother of a criminal and an associate of criminals.

She died without ever knowing the least doubt of Aniello's uprightness.

Angelo had long since betrayed the "baroque" cast. From childhood his temper had been ungovernable, its manifestations vicious. After his mother's death he began openly to seek evil associations; no one in the family had any influence over him, Aniello least of all. Francesca he respected in some measure, because she had the gift of seeing through him, of reading his mind—especially when its content was not such as he was desirous of sharing. He grew to hate the girl for that.

When at length his bias for the society of his kind brought him into contact with members of the American Camorra, and he learned of his uncle's complicity in its affairs, it was Francesca who divined the course of his thoughts and learned what he strove frantically to hide

from her, that Angelo had offered himself to the Society as a novice, a picciotto 'i sgarro.

To advance from this grade one must be guilty of some act of signal service to the Camorra, such as the murder of one of its enemies or one whom it has marked down for slaughter for a stipulated fee.

When in the horror excited by her discovery the girl cried out, threatening to denounce him to her father, Angelo without hesitation launched himself at her throat, intending her death.

Unquestionably, since he was armed and insane with rage, he would have consummated his purpose had it not been for the intervention of Aniello and Rodney Man-ship.

"I knew then," Francesca said, "he would visit disaster upon us all. But not in what fashion . . ."

For a moment she held a melancholy silence.

XVIII

IN the code of the Camorra there is one crime for which the only and certain punishment is death—'nfamita, treason to the order. For the police spy or paid informer who worms his way into its confidence it knows no mercy, much less for the member who betrays a comrade in either greed or revenge.

"Only a Cammorista could have given the information that led to the raid," said Francesca. "There were many besides Angelo who knew, many who, for all I know, hated my uncle and father and wished their ruin. As for Angelo, he knew they kept all their money in one bank, in my father's name. So when father drew his will, he willed not only his own property but everything Uncle Liborio had to leave—of course, with his approval. Therefore Angelo knew that Uncle Liborio must have consented to a will that to all intents disinherited him. He had other reasons for hating him, too . . .

"But whether or not it should turn out that the traitor was my own brother, my vow bound me, I had to go on . . . to the end."

Her plans were all made when she left America for England, she knew what she intended to the final detail.

"Do you remember, Rodney, that night at the Chatham, when you wanted me to fight the will and I refused, giving as my reason that not to contest it would be to lull the enemy into a false sense of security? It was for the same reason I went to England. I knew I'd be—perhaps not followed but—spied upon; and that, when it was reported I had opened up my house in London and settled down, apparently content, they—the enemy, whoever they

might be—would think I had given up and forgotten. But Angelo—if it was Angelo—should have known me better.”

“I’m not sure he even knew where you were. That shyster, Croce, tried to worm your address out of me, but of course failed.”

“Still, I’m sure they found out ultimately. I was on the *qui vive*, you know, and there was enough proof that I was being watched all through those first few months in London. I had to wait till they got tired of it before I dared do anything. But I moved quickly then, I promise you.”

She made no secret of her destination when finally she did leave London to become Madame Farusi’s guest at her villa in Florence. If she were to be followed, Francesca wanted to know it; and the best way to make sure was to leave a broad and open trail for the guidance of whomsoever might choose to be concerned. But her most jealous watchfulness detected no sign of a gratuitous shadow en route, and after a quiet week in Florence she was satisfied that the surveillance of which she had been conscious in London had been dropped—or had failed, it might be, through simple discouragement, having found so little to reward it.

“Still I don’t know what I should have done without Nella Farusi. She was so sweet and sympathetic, whenever I was at a loss she knew just what ought to be done, whenever I was discouraged she gave me new heart.”

“You mean to say Madame Farusi approved—!”

“There’d be another story to tell if she hadn’t. You see, Rodney, she herself was born in Naples, she lost a brother through the Camorra, she knows what it means and hates it as my father hated it—as I hate it!”

And so, in the bleak of one still, clear dawn, Madame Farusi might have been (but fortunately for her reputation wasn’t) seen to leave the villa and enter her motor-car under the gallant escort of a young man, slenderly

elegant of figure even in his cloak, who might very well have been Angelo Baroque on his best behaviour—or, rather, on better than his known best. And Florence saw neither of them more.

Under cover of darkness, the previous night, Francesca's nurse Marcella had slipped away upon an independent errand, concerning which she had been furnished with explicit instructions. A shrewd old thing, not unintelligent, dependable, active for all her years, hopelessly devoted to her mistress, and no lover of Angelo . . .

Madame Farusi and her interesting young companion were at pains so to time their motor tour as to enter Naples after dark. Thus it happened that their chauffeur, unacquainted with the city, wandered from the beaten track. He found it again quickly enough; but the fugitive glimpses of mean side streets by night, with their formicating life, which constituted Francesca's first impressions of the cradle of her forebears, caused the elation, the sense of coming courageously to grips with adventurous fortune, which had been welling fitfully in her bosom for the last few days, to give place to misgivings and vague alarm. Not without excuse: the impact of Naples upon natural upon sensitive and unprepared perceptions must be staggering, when it isn't sickening.

On arriving at their hotel, Francesca locked herself into her room in a state of mind not remotely resembling panic. She had been on the road since earliest morning and was desperately tired, yet could not sleep. From her pillow she could see through a window a stain like blood in the sky, the baleful halo of Vesuvius. From the streets rose a rumour, swelling and fainting, like the gnarl of a beast at once sluggish and bloodthirsty. Against her will she was revisited by memories of what she had already seen of stark poverty, squalour, and disease; and reminded that she had as yet but skirted the outer fringes of that terrible, strange city, she shuddered and was afraid.

She began dimly to comprehend that crime and the Camorra were the natural spawn of such conditions.

"I am sure," she told Rodney, "if I had been brought up in such an environment, I too must have turned out 'baroque.' "

Since it was no part of her plan to risk recognition and exposure of her impersonation through any mischance, however unlikely, she made believe to be indisposed, the following day, and kept to her room. Madame Farusi it was who fared abroad and kept a clandestine rendezvous with the faithful Marcella, bringing back such information as was essential.

It was weary waiting for Francesca, alone there in a strange hotel in a strange city, alone with her faint hopes and her fears that hourly gained strength and waxed in stature. The prospects revealed by the windows did little to distract or soothe away her apprehensions. Even in that vast, enveloping brilliance of sunlight, even under that immaculate, dense sky of matchless blue, she thought to detect a sense of something sinister in the aspect of the city, in the way its congeries of dwellings spread and sprawled over hillsides and ridges, lifting up terrace upon terrace like many-windowed cliffs whose ledges and crevices sprouted living green—something anomalous in the serene beauty of the bay, something ominous and minatory in the far-flung profile of Vesuvius with its grim convolutions of smoke writhing up to soil the heavens.

Nor did the kaleidoscopic ferment of those sidewalks which her windows overlooked help to dissipate the sense of unreality or mitigate the illusion of a city of living death, a city spellbound in portentous suspense, waiting dumbly in the impotence of black enchantment against the crack of doom . . .

Evening brought back Madame Farusi with word that every arrangement had been made. They dined quietly, then settled to wear out another long while of waiting. At length it was dark. Madame Farusi kissed Francesca

good-bye and pressed upon her an automatic pistol. The girl in her dress of a man went downstairs and left the hotel.

Outside its doors she was set upon by a milling swarm of beggars, touts, and self-styled guides. She paused in dismay, bewildered by that nightmare ring of swarthy faces with rolling eyes and gleaming teeth, deafened by vociferous solicitations, importuned by insatiable, clawing, pawing hands. Then through the thick one fought his way, leaving a wake of sore ribs and trodden toes, pursued by groans and imprecations.

A tall and brawny creature with an open countenance, the look of a genial animal and the swagger of a bravo; Francesca remarked that, though all cursed him, not one offered to resent his brutality in kind. As he came on he continued without ceasing to offer himself as a guide; and in the tumultuous stream of his speech a certain phrase, not in itself noteworthy or out of character, recurred again and again. Francesca signified her acceptance of his services.

At once he took charge of her and, turning on the rabble, assailed it with furious gestures and foul squalls of vilification. It gave way sullenly, growling, snarling, heaping maledictions upon his head. Grasping Francesca's arm above the elbow her guide hurried her round the first corner into a dark and narrow alley. Here he checked, made sure they were clear of eavesdroppers, and tersely enquired:

"The name, signor?"

"Barocco."

"Come, then. You are awaited. Let us not waste time. *He* does not like to be kept waiting."

As if it no longer mattered to him whether his charge followed or not, he plunged away through the shadows at a gruelling gait. More than once Francesca had to break into a trot to catch up, but never once did he slacken pace or look back to see how she was standing it.

In less than two minutes the girl had lost all sense of direction in the wanderings of a labyrinth of dark byways, all narrow, tortuous, and walled in by tall rookeries to whose forbidding façades iron balconies festooned with bedding clung like fungoid growths.

By twists and turns and doublings, under arches, through tunnel-like passages, up flights of stone steps short and long—interminable they often seemed to Francesca, labouring at the heels of her guide—the two fled like hunted things; and always they were climbing. There was, indeed, ironic paradox to be read in the circumstance that the higher the ground they traversed the lower the character of the quarter—one in which (Francesca was well aware) the life of a stranger would be worth not a minute's purchase save by favour of the Camorra.

In those vile channels life alternately ran in brawling rapids or churned slowly, like scum on a sullen backwater; but fluent or stagnant in all seeming grew ever more exuberant, less reticent, and noisier.

Here unglazed windows and doors open to the street disclosed frankly to the passerby domestic interiors like drawings in black-and-white gouache, cluttered rooms whose shadows crowded jealously oases of dull light shed by smoking lamps, and in which whole families slept, ate, fought, loved, bred and died, all with the completest absence of self-consciousness.

One's ears knew no respite from the slurring sibilance of the Neapolitan vernacular, twanging and buzzing of stringed instruments, scuffle of bare feet and clatter of shoes upon the stones, snatches of unseemly songs . . .

Hither and yon curious lights flared and faded, repellent shadows lurked, out of them strange faces peered and leered like masks of imbecility and sin spewed up from the vilest deep of the Pit . . .

Panting and stumbling, Francesca had begun almost to believe that this weird flight would never know an end, when her guide halted before a door at the end of a blind

alley, knuckled it loudly, and sang in a full barytone a stave of popular song.

There was a wait. He eyed Francesca with a smile of contempt.

"Blown, signor? A brave picciott' you'll make!"

She said nothing to this, and he held a grinning silence until the door swung noiselessly open, admitting them to a long, arched passageway, paved with stone. This led them into the dark, still courtyard of a venerable palazzo, whose lightless windows stared down upon a silent fountain, patches of brown earth that had once been flower-beds, flagged walks in whose cracks grass grew thick and long. With a sign bidding the girl to wait, her guide lost himself in the thick darkness beneath a gallery that ran round the four sides of the court.

He was gone so long that she began to be uneasy; but at length he reappeared in one of the arches of the gallery, beckoning with his head. She followed, to be welcomed by a door that opened of a sudden, letting out a warm flood of light. Blinking, she found herself in a room wide and deep and little less bare than the cell of an anchorite.

There was no rug on the tessellated floor; neither pictures nor draperies broke the monotony of whitewashed walls; for all furniture, a vast old bed plainly dressed, a table almost as large on which were a lamp, writing materials, and books, a washstand, a bookcase, two common chairs, and a third on wheels.

The door closed behind Francesca; she was alone with the tenant of the wheeled chair.

He sat quite stirless, with hands like bleached claws of a bird folded in his lap; an old, old man, his physical insignificance of younger years today pathetically wasted and crippled by disease; dressed in a heavy woollen gown, with a white neckerchief knotted round his throat, a plain rug over his knees. Perhaps because of the extreme emaciation of his body, his head seemed abnormally large,

but it was finely modelled, as were the features over which the skin was taut and colourless with that utter absence of colour which one associates with things that have never known sunlight. Only the eyebrows were jet black and the eyes beneath them black and of extraordinary fire and intelligence.

The unwinking stare of those uncanny eyes seemed to bore Francesca through and through. She felt suddenly a little faint and giddy with fright. How should she hope to deceive this one, this creature of evil who, despite his hopeless decrepitude, had for nearly half a century by sheer force of mind alone held command of the Society of Camorra and directed its destiny with inflexible will and unfailing cunning?

XIX

FRANCESCA retained enough presence of mind to offer the indispensable salute of profound veneration; and the short-lived respite of that moment when her head was bowed and the spell of those relentlessly skeptical eyes was broken, enabled the girl to reanimate her sinking heart with the reminder that she stood now at a pass of mortal significance, where flawless address and audacity alone could save her. One little hint of the qualms with which she was inwardly a-quake would be fatal: she had ventured too far into the arcana of the Mala Vita to hope to escape if found wanting in any way but most of all in point of courage.

So, her act of homage punctiliously performed, she lifted her head high to look down boldly upon that shape of strange immobility in the wheeled chair, at once tolerating and challenging its persistent and cynical regard.

For several seconds (they seemed as many long-drawn minutes) nothing rewarded her, not so much as the trembling of an eyelash modified the impassivity of the man in the chair. Only the sardonic intelligence that informed his eyes flawed the illusion of a figure fashioned of wax.

At length, however, as if despairing of the attempt to wear down her patience, that head of a diabolical patriarch in its frame of snowy hair was almost imperceptibly inclined, heavy eyelids instantaneously curtained those disconcerting eyes, a voice as coldly metallic as the sound of a steel bell issued from cruel and pallid lips:

“Come nearer.”

The girl complied without hesitation, and when she stood before the chair heard another word—“Kneel!”—and dropped upon a knee. A hand like a talon was prof-

ferred. She took it on finger tips and pressed her lips to its back. An invincible shiver rippled down her spine, for it was as if she kissed something less than living flesh, something icy with the grave's eternal cold.

"Arise."

She got up. The man in the chair lifted his gaze to her face, but finding the angle of vision difficult, with a flirt of the hand in which there was a hint of temper, required her to stand back. Completely docile, she retreated a few paces, till another sign bade her pause.

"Your name?"

"Francesco Barocco."

The wraith of a mordant smile writhed the thin and bloodless lips, and the girl felt herself transfixed by a pang of pure fear. Did he then already suspect—?

"Barocco: I know that name."

"Who of Naples does not?"

The brilliant eyes clouded. "There were two brothers, I believe," the man said with a faintly satiric inflexion. "If I am not in error, they emigrated to America many years ago."

"My father and uncle."

"Yes?" A slight lift of the heavy black eyebrows lent this a supercilious accent. "Which was which?"

"My father's name was Aniello, my uncle's—"

"I remember: Liborio. A bold soul, over-bold at times, not always prudent, not always discreet."

Francesca loosed an arrow into the air.

"One was confident you would not have forgotten."

A faint stress on the pronoun *you* earned her a hawk-like glance of suspicion so strong that it nearly resembled alarm. So her arrow had found a chink in the armour! She wondered where. If only she knew! But the shot had been wholly at random . . .

"And these old friends—I might almost call them my brothers—they are well, I trust, and prosperous?"

"They are dead, *si masto*."

"Dead!"

"They died at the same time, months ago."

The old head nodded thoughtfully. "It would have been like that with them. As memory serves, they were twins."

"Like my brother and myself."

"You have a brother, then?"

"His name is Angelo."

"Your father had no other children?"

"Only Angelo and me, *si masto*."

"But your uncle—?"

"My uncle never married."

"Ah, yes—yes." The man in the chair was watching her intently, and she was again conscious of the faint suggestion of his derisive smile. "And is your brother much like you, since you are twins?"

"Very," she contrived to reply, feeling as if her knees were water.

"And do I understand that you have come from America to see me?"

"Yes, *si masto*."

"It is a far journey . . . Why?"

Francesca obliquely replied: "Some time before his death my father told me of a friend whom he had had in Naples, a dear friend whom he had been fortunate enough to do a great service."

"He had a name, I presume, this famous friend?"

"*Si masto*, his first name was the same as my father's. For that reason they always called each other brother. The name was Aniello Ansiello."

"I remember," said the old man, nodding—"I knew that one, too."

"He rose to a high place, *si masto*, a very high place; he became Supreme Master of the Honourable Society of Camorra."

"But then, as I recall, he died."

"He disappeared," Francesca corrected gravely. "He

had made himself so powerful that the Italian Government itself came to fear him. He disappeared, and another took his place as Supreme Master. But it is said he did not die, and his successors were mere marionettes that moved only when Aniello Ansiello manipulated the strings."

"A fanciful tale, Francesco Barocco."

"Perhaps, *si masto*."

"But if you seek this Aniello Ansiello, your father's friend, I regret I can be of no service to you."

"I am not so sure," Francesca contended coolly. "There was a certain ring . . ."

The folded hands upon the rug stirred and unclosed; in the palm of one lay an old-fashioned signet ring, an onyx intaglio in a setting of gold exquisitely wrought.

"That ring," said Francesca.

"What of it?"

"But for it I should not be here talking to you, *si masto*. I sent it to you by another hand with my petition for this audience. The ring was my father's. Aniello Ansiello gave it him in earnest of his gratitude and his promise to serve him in turn to the full of his power if ever my father were in need of assistance or protection—'either you or your children,' were the words of Aniello Ansiello as my father repeated them to me. I have come from America to ask the redemption of that promise."

"But since Aniello Ansiello is no more, why do you apply to me?"

"That pledge was given in the name of the Camorra by its Supreme Master. It is a matter of the honour of the Honourable Society, not of the man. Aside from that," Francesca pointedly added, "you are not dead, *si masto*."

"That is true," the old man admitted without betraying any resentment of her boldness—"in a sense I am not dead. But"—the wasted hands lifted suddenly, fluttering like dead leaves, in a passion of despair—"is it a life I live, and for thirty years have lived, confined to this chair,

penned within these four walls? What are friends or enemies to one in such a plight as mine? Shades of dead yesterdays. What is a promise uttered many years ago? Ghosts of dead words that beat without meaning on my ears."

But that seizure of emotion swiftly passed. The hands fell and were again folded in a form of resignation upon the rug, the brittle voice resumed: "What is it you require, then, of the Honourable Society?"

"Let it redeem its promise to the dead by permitting me to serve it."

"You!"

Of a sudden a horrible thing happened, something whose horror in her understanding passed Francesca's ability to portray: the creature in the chair laughed aloud, a spasm of malicious mirth laid hold of him and shook him bodily, shook discordant cackles out of him as one might shake cracked dice from a cup.

More frightened than affronted, the girl shrank back with a movement of dismay and repugnance uncontrollable; and this seemed to bring the other to his senses, for his unholy derision choked in full peal, and in a twinkling he was as he had been, motionless and calm with a show of deadly calm denied only the ironic glimmer of his eyes.

"So you would serve the Camorra?" Francesca made a sound of assent. "May one enquire in what way?"

With a great effort the girl made herself articulate.

"There is treason—'nfamita—at work among those who call themselves good Camorristi in America. This demands to be run down and exposed."

The shrewd, bright eyes narrowed intently.

"Explain."

As briefly as she might Francesca narrated the story of the raid upon the antique shop of Baroque Brothers.

"Treachery alone did that," she concluded; "through treachery the Camorra has lost a source of great revenue—and I my father and uncle. With the Camorra 'nfamita

calls for punishment; with me, *si masto*, blood cries aloud for blood."

"But the Camorra, I think, may be trusted to cleanse its honour in its own time and way."

"Nevertheless, it will not wisely refuse one who has so powerful a motive for serving it faithfully and well in this affair."

"Possibly. But you could have served it without coming to Naples, one might argue."

"Before I can accomplish anything, it is necessary that I be accepted as a good Camorrista; before that can be, I must have your countenance, *si masto*. In America my suspicions are known to the guilty, they will not have me of their number lest I unmask them. But with your sanction . . . Furthermore, you alone can remit the term of my novitiate. If I must serve one year as *picciotto d'honore* and three more as *piciotto di sgarra*—what shall I hope to find out in New York four years hence?"

"That is the least of your difficulties. There are others, two others of major importance to be dealt with. The law of the Camorra may never be suspended in this respect, that he who would become a Camorrista in full standing must first prove himself a man of heart and worthy of such honour by some act of courage and devotion to the Honourable Society."

Francesca contrived to cover a shudder with a shrug. Too well she knew what was meant.

"I am ready, *si masto*. Only tell me what I must do."

"That is not so easy to decide off-hand. But it is an obligation not to be forgotten, even if it be possible to circumvent the greater difficulty."

Francesca found her mouth so dry she could hardly form the words: "And that, *si masto*—?"

She saw the shadowy and mocking smile reillumine the astute eyes.

"The Camorra does not admit women to membership."

The girl uttered a cry of dismay, and began to tremble.

"You knew!" she stammered. "You have known all along!"

The man assented with a deliberate nod.

"Did you think to cheat Aniello Ansiello? But the dead know everything!"

She cast about wildly, contemplating flight, and he put an end to that.

"Be at ease. You shall never escape without my consent."

In terror she sank upon her knees, offering clasped hands of pitiful supplication. The smile of scorn deepened the lines of the pallid mask that looked down upon her, a wave of negligent fingers bade her rise.

"Have I said that you ask the impossible? But no: it can be arranged—and shall, if you continue of the same mind."

She could only stare, dumb in incredulity. The man was turning the ring over and over in his palm.

"A promise is a promise," he mused aloud; "not even the dead may evade the obligations they assumed in life. What is it to me if to grant this request is to send you to your death? Shall a dead man hold the laws of the Camorra more sacred than his pledged word? If Aniello Barocco had not done Aniello Ansiello a great service, Aniello Ansiello might never have become Supreme Master of the Honourable Society and its slave, a living corpse condemned to this living tomb. Shall I forgive that act of friendship which made me what you see and break my word to save the children of my friend? Listen to me, my girl: The Camorra is already tottering. This spirit alone"—he tapped his bosom—"holds it together. A little, and I shall be no more. Then the Honourable Society will go down in ruin. Do I owe it so much for making me what I am, that I must hesitate to speed its disintegration?"

He laughed again, and the insanity of his merriment chilled the heart of the girl.

"It shall be as you wish. Only I tell you—and remember, the dead know the future—you shall gain your end only at cost of your life."

He rang a little silver bell that stood upon the edge of the table, convenient to his hand.

"Go now: return to your hotel. Discreet arrangements will be made and communicated to you in due course. And be patient: the Camorra of Aniello Ansiello will not fail to make good its pledge."

Francesca grew conscious of a cold draft upon the back of her neck. The door behind her had opened noiselessly, upon its threshold her guide stood leering. The creature in the wheeled chair dropped his head, signifying that the audience was at an end. She turned and stumbled out.

As the door closed she looked fearfully overshoulder, and had her last glimpse of the Supreme Master of the Camorra.

Stirless, he sat gazing into space, the black eyes, blank and lightless, staring fixedly as if awaiting the office of some kindly hand to close them. Upon his blanched and ascetic countenance a curious, ghastly smile was hovering, like a shade of evil made manifest.

XX

NOT till she found herself delivered from the oppression of that goblin intelligence which, from the invalid chair of decrepitude, from the bare cell of death in life, ruled over the Camorra of Naples with the iron authority of a demogorgon, did Francesca begin to appreciate how desperate had been the pitch of nervous tension to which she had been keyed against and throughout her hour of audience.

Reaction left her so enervated in body and mind that, as she crossed the dark, still courtyard with her guide, she was dully conscious of wavering footsteps and, coming to the silent marble fountain, was fain to stop and rest a little upon its lichened coping.

"Wait!" she quavered.

The Camorrista paused in staring annoyance.

"What's wrong?" he growled. "Why, you're trembling like a woman! One would think you'd failed to pass."

"Pass—?" she echoed witlessly.

"He made no sign," the man replied testily. "Otherwise you would be tasting cold steel this very minute. What do you think, then? Is it likely the Old One would let a rejected candidate go free to betray him? . . . Though the good God knows what use he can have for such as you!"

He spat in contempt, but in the next breath seemed to perceive some signal of which Francesca was unaware and, in a ferocious mutter bidding her stop where she was, bounded away to lose himself in the darkness beneath the gallery.

Glad of the respite, Francesca threw back her head and,

looking up to the rectangle of star-stippled sky framed by the inner walls of the palazzo, filled her lungs again and again with the sweet breath of night, feeling as if she were washing them clean of the effluvia of a tomb.

A measure of composure returned to her, she ceased to tremble, but her mind was all a-crawl with fears like snakes in a thicket.

To this extremity she had come in pursuit of her vow of vengeance, that she stood committed to the execution of some nameless act of infamy at the will of that monstrous genius whose presence she had just quitted!

Nor dared she harbour hope of evading her self-assumed obligation to give proof in deeds of her fitness to become a member of the Honourable Society of Camorra; however hideous the task the malicious ingenuity of its Supreme Master might devise, she might not even so much as demur—to refuse would be sheer self-destruction.

Stung to sharp action by this tardy perception of the plight into which her infatuation had led her, Francesca jumped up and cast about for the mouth of the passageway to the street, thinking of nothing but flight, reckless of consequences.

Perhaps fortunately, that impulse stirred too late; she had no more than left her seat upon the coping of the fountain when, to her blank dismay, she found her guide before her, bowing and smirking in a change of attitude so entire that she could only gape in amaze. And then, before she knew what he was about, the man had caught her in his arms, embraced her affectionately, and printed an ardent kiss on each of her cheeks.

But she found herself free again before she could muster her wits to resent the indignity; the hands she raised to thrust the fellow away barely brushed his bosom as, scraping and grinning, he fell back.

“You beast!” she stormed furiously. “What the devil do you mean—?”

The Camorrista rounded the shoulders of humility and sawed the air with deprecating hands.

"But the accolade, O little comrade! the accolade. Must you be angry with me if, having learned from the Old One himself what honour he has in store for you, I make haste to salute you with the kiss of confraternity?"

The walls of the ancient courtyard mocked in ghostly hisses his half-whispered explanations, while Francesca collected herself sufficiently to comprehend the inference implicit, that the "Old One"—that stricken spider who waited back there, motionless in his lonely web of death—really meant to keep faith and make easy her acceptance by the Camorra.

"Basta!" she silenced the man—"enough! You took me by surprise. I did not understand at first. It is no matter. Let us go."

Invisible in the gloom of the passageway, someone was waiting to let them out; and when they had passed through to the street Francesca heard the muffled clank of iron bars falling into their sockets on the inside of the door. A sound to make one shudder . . .

"Come!" she cried, nervously imperative—"hasten, it is late!"

And indeed, by the comparative quiet of the ways they threaded, it was later than she had imagined, she had been closeted with the "Old One" longer than she guessed. Streets that earlier had been fluent with the restless flux and reflux of a population largely homeless now wore the semblance of vast bivouacs cluttered with bodies of those who slept, with the charming abandon of the Italian vagrant, where sleep had overtaken them, sprawling in the gutter with a crooked arm for a pillow, semi-recumbent in the angle of a wall, or curled upon the sidewalk with head upon a doorstep. And where a myriad voices had been clamorous in love and hate and drunkenness, in melody and blasphemy, there was now snoring on every hand, a nocturne in barbarous dissonances infrequently

punctuated by hushed calls, moaning cries, or, more rarely still, muted snatches of song.

Unto these last, Francesca observed, her companion seemed to lend an ever heedful ear as he padded at her elbow, now and again mumbling a word or two of advice as to the next turning, or phrases of flattery and fawning. For whatever the wraith of Aniello Ansiello had said to this one, it had worked an agreeable improvement in his manners, reducing him to a deference approaching servility; and where he had before led at the top of his speed and left Francesca to follow as best she might or be damned to her, he was now content to pace obsequiously by her side, only occasionally ranging on ahead a few yards to spy out the way, as if to make sure it was quite safe for his charge.

Perhaps he had received a warning of some sort, while waiting for her to finish her interview with the "Old One," to give him substantial grounds for misgivings; or it may have been simple premonition that weighed upon his spirits . . .

They were still far from the hotel, by Francesca's dead reckoning, still inextricably ensnarled in the matted byways of that gloomy slum, when of a sudden, approaching a blind corner, the man stopped, grasped her wrist with a peremptory hand and, growling an imprecation, stiffened like a jungle beast at first wind of danger.

Startled, the girl questioned fearfully the shadows that surrounded them, but saw none that moved, and listened acutely, but heard only the forlorn mewing of an invisible cat, lost and hungry in the night.

"What is it?" she breathed, unsuccessfully twisting her imprisoned wrist.

"Silence!" the man hissed. "Attention!"

Still she heard nothing but the complaint of the cat, and presently even that was hushed.

With another oath the Camorrista shifted his hold to her upper arm and, dragging Francesca with him, began

to run back the way they had come, but within a dozen yards or so stopped short in mid-stride and again stood tensely poised in alarm.

Somewhere on ahead, the unseen cat was mewling again; and when its voice fell Francesca heard a man's, near at hand, a melting tenor softly singing a phrase of an old, old song she had heard her uncle hum a thousand times in days dead and gone:

"Oi ne', trasteve, ca chiora!"

And if one needed proof that this was a warning cue of the Camorra, Francesca had it in the wrench her arm suffered as her guide again wheeled about and broke into a run.

"What is it?" she cried over and over, stumbling on the cobbles as she tried to emulate the lope of the Camorrista. "What has happened? Tell me—please!"

But the man might have been ignorant of Italian for all the attention he gave her more than inhered in that vice-like clutch of her arm, whose flesh was to bear the prints of his fingers for many a day to come.

They were once more at the turning when from the black mouth of a nearby doorway a dark shape darted, a cloak flapping from its shoulders like wings of some monstrous bird of prey, and with incredible fury flew at Francesca's guide. Out of the corner of an eye the latter saw his danger; and thrusting the girl aside, swung with a yelp of rage to receive the assault.

They came together with a shock that sent each reeling back, but instantly closed in again, grappled and went down into the kennel, where they fought like maniacs, locked in each other's arms, indistinguishable one from the other, a blurred bulk that heaved and flopped and writhed—and then, abruptly, to the sound of a deep groan, ceased.

An affair of seconds, it was over so quickly that Francesca had not stirred from the spot where she had checked

on being thrown aside, when she saw her Camorrista rising from the body of his assailant.

He was breathing heavily, and by the dim light of a distant street lamp the girl could see his features working, his eyes rolling like those of a maddened animal; but he seemed to be unharmed, and when, in stupidity of horror, she gasped "What have you done?" she heard him give a sound between a grunt and a laugh, and saw in the palm of a hand which he thrust before her eyes the haft of a knife whose blade had snapped off short.

From that too eloquent testimony, as much as from the thing that had been slain at her feet, the girl cowered back, sickened. But now again the cat was mewling, and the man threw back a startled head and searched the shadows on every hand, while from a distance the tenor in a minor wail iterated the caution against foul weather:

"Oi ne', trasteve, ca choira!"

Whatever the crime which had won him his place in the ranks of the Camorra and the trust of the "Old One" as well, the guide proved not wanting in courage. His comment on the repetition of the warning was prefaced by a grim chuckle, as he stepped nearer to Francesca.

"More? But they are gluttons, don't you think? Here: have you got a weapon of any sort, you? Give it me—quickly!"

With no definite notion of what she was doing, the girl dragged from a pocket Nella Farusi's pistol, and permitted the man to snatch it away.

"Ah-h!" he snarled exultantly. "Now we shall see—"

The mewling of the cat here became a discordant squawk that silenced the words on his lips; and catching Francesca's wrist a second time, the man dragged her round the corner. . . .

What happened then was never clear to her; even when lapse of time rendered it possible for her to hark back to that passage with some approximation of calm, it was all a nightmarish muddle in her memory.

Shouts, a vision of several men bearing down on her and her companion as they swung into the next street, pistol shots, a personal collision with one whom she somehow managed to throw off and who failed to return to the attack, more shots, vivid flashes of orange and gold stabbing the night, shrieks that curdled her very soul, an instantaneous impression of one who ran weaving and faltering like a drunkard, then collapsed and did not rise again . . .

She came to herself standing with back to a wall, hands clipping her cheeks, a cry bubbling in her throat, wide and dilate eyes photographing permanently upon the tablets of her memory a tableau of terror:

Across the street a number of little lamps, burning without flicker in the still night air, created a space of lurid colour in the dark, casting up into theatrical illumination an open shrine, a deep niche in a wall sheltering a crucifix with the pale, emaciated figure of the tortured Christ half life-size and coloured with frightful realism, blood welling from the wounds, a bloody sweat upon the face of agony. At the foot of the crucifix, votive offerings of flowers, withered and fresh. Below the shrine, seated sideways on the cobbles, a shoulder and his head resting against the wall, the Camorrista who had been her guide, dying. In the kennel in the middle of the street another man, motionless, a huddle of clothing like an ill-packed sack. Several yards away, a third unstirring shape . . .

XXI

I HAVE simply no recollection whatever of getting back to the hotel that night," Francesca assured Rodney Manship. "I remember running over to the wounded man, my guide; but there wasn't anything I could do for him, he had been simply riddled by bullets. I took his head on my knees, and he tried to tell me something, I couldn't make out what; but I think he wanted me to leave him and save myself, for with the last of his strength he managed to lift the pistol and put it, still hot and reeking, into my hand. Then he turned his head away and quietly died.

"All the while there were voices all round us, shouting and screaming, and people running about. Somebody, some man, caught hold of my sleeve and tugged at it, urging me to get up. I remember putting the head of the dead man down on the cobbles, and rising . . .

"The next thing was waking up in my room at the hotel, with Nella Farusi bending over and shaking me. I fancy I felt as a drug addict must when he comes back to his senses, heavy and sick; I couldn't think connectedly and didn't seem to want to, probably on account of that horror hiding just under the surface of consciousness, waiting for me to recall it. Instinctively I must have been afraid of remembering. Aside from that, I didn't know where I was, at first, or how I'd got there, and I didn't recognize Nella Farusi immediately. Poor dear! she was half frantic.

"She had lain awake half the night, reading and waiting for me to come back. She says it was hard to keep her mind on what she was reading, because of worrying; most

of the time she just lay there, listening for my footsteps; and then she fell asleep and didn't hear me come in, and when she woke up it was broad daylight. She jumped out of bed, ran into my room, and found me lying across the foot of my bed, still dressed in my man's clothes, with the pistol on the counterpane, where I'd dropped it, I presume. I was sleeping so heavily, it took minutes to wake me.

"As it turned out, it was lucky for me it happened like that; for if Nella had been awake when I came in she would have put me to bed, of course, and I wouldn't have been presentable to receive early callers, especially when they didn't give me any time to prepare myself, but walked in on us without taking the trouble to knock, and shut and locked the door behind them."

She was finishing breakfast in the sitting-room she shared with Nella Farusi when that happened—if it's fair to dignify with the name of breakfast so sorry a pretext for a meal, a few mouthfuls of roll, a few swallows of coffee choked down because Nella Farusi insisted Francesca must eat to keep up her strength.

They were making futile and panicky efforts to decide what to do, which way to fly, when the two men walked in on them. One was a porter employed by the hotel, a sturdy, broad-shouldered rogue with a fetching smile and the homely, open countenance of the honest man that he was not. The other was a tolerably imposing presence, a person of urbane middle-age with the port of a senator and the dress of a member of the diplomatic corps, from polished silk hat to spotless white spats—attire so formal that, considered in relation to the portentously grave countenance he wore, it satisfied Francesca at sight she had now to face nothing less than arrest for participation in that tragic brawl in the night.

Her consternation struck her dumb and immobile, save that those dark eyes widened in a face whose pallor grew more intense as she rose; and this stricken calm must

have passed for the composure of callousness in the sight of the two men.

Nella Farusi got up, too, with a startled exclamation half-smothered by knuckles pressed to her lips.

"What—what do you want?" she demanded tremulously, since Francesca said nothing. "What right have you—?"

"Pardon, Madame Farusi," said the gentleman in the white spats with a bow that would have graced the court of his king, a deep bend from the hips with the silk hat held over his heart. "It is of urgent necessity that I speak alone for a few moments with Signor Francesco Barocco."

Francesca found her voice again. "I am Francesco Barocco," she said with a steadiness that surprised her. "What do you want with me?"

"Signor!" Another bow of profound respect. "If Madame Farusi will be so gracious . . ."

A sweeping gesture consigned the precious hat, and the ebony stick that went with it, to the porter, who reverently deposited them in a safe place, while their owner strode impressively to the door that communicated with Nella Farusi's bedchamber, opened it, and executed yet still another of his overpowering bows.

"For a few minutes only, madame."

Madame Farusi consulted Francesca with a look and, when the girl inclined her head slightly, took it for granted that she was in full command of herself, and left the room.

Her disappearance was the signal for an amazing demonstration. His face aglow with admiration and enthusiasm, the porter threw himself upon Francesca's neck, embraced her, saluted her cheeks with the twin kisses of the accolade, and then with immense solemnity bestowed a third upon her forehead.

"O honoured and heroic youth!" he gurgled in ecstasy—"O brother!"—and stepping aside, surrendered

Francesca to like treatment at the hands and lips of the stranger of distinguished appearance.

It was too much. She was overcome and faint with the relief from first fears, and at the same time stupid with astonishment, incapable either of understanding the reason for such proofs of respect and affection from that ill-assorted pair of strangers or of acknowledging them in any adequate manner. So she remained unresponsive while they fawned upon her, pawed her, and sang her praises in a sort of antiphonal chant, first one, then the other taking up the tale of her courage, prowess, and eminent qualifications for enrollment in the hierarchy of the Camorra.

But gradually the meaning of it all began to become apparent, she grasped and gasped at perception of the fact that these two conceived her to have been responsible for the three out of the four murders which her guide had done, before being slaughtered in his turn, in that street affray.

The gloom of ill-lighted ways together with the suddenness and the confusion that had marked the affair were in part responsible for that, but even more the reputation of her guide. It transpired that the fellow had been a notorious bravo and duellist of the Honourable Society, but a true Camorrista who had remained loyal to its deadly trinity of steel, the *settesoldi*, the *'o zumpafuosso*, and the *triangolo*, holding in contempt devotees of the modern school of the automatic pistol and the bomb.

Only a fortnight earlier, Francesca learned, his arrest had been decreed by authority so exalted that even the Camorra could not influence it. Nevertheless, insolently confident that his popular prestige would preserve for him the immunity he had so long enjoyed, he had continued to go openly about his affairs and to rely, if worst came to worst, upon his really formidable ability with the knife.

Its work upon the body of his first assailant had been reckoned unmistakable; but since he had never been known to use a firearm, Francesca, found with the man's head on her knees and a fuming pistol in her hand, was credited with having slain three out of the four Carabinieri who had been specially commissioned to take their man dead or alive.

And now no less a personage than a delegate of the Publica Sicurezza of Naples, himself a prominent Camorrista elegante, had come in company with the capo paranze of the Camorra in that quarter, to felicitate the girl upon her service to the Honourable Society, inform her of her promotion to its highest rank (such was the significance of the kiss upon the forehead) convey to her the gratification of the "Old One," and arrange for her immediate departure from Naples and from Italy as well.

The affair had created no end of a furore, she was assured, already the Government of Italy itself was rumbling ominously. The Camorra would need to go warily till the wind of public indignation changed. Thus far nothing was known outside the Honourable Society as to the identity of the youth who had fought so nobly in defense of the dead Camorrista; but one could never tell what might leak out. It would be injudicious in the extreme for Francesca to delay her flight by so much as a day, even for so important a ceremony as her ritualistic initiation. That not only could but must wait till her arrival in New York. But she would be given letters to insure her a cordial reception there.

"The *Dante Alighieri* sails from Genoa day after tomorrow," the delegato informed the girl. "You would do well to be aboard her. Reservation will be made for you in any name you choose, signor. I would not hesitate to counsel you to sail in disguise—but it *would* be convenient, on the other hand, if you could only use your American passport."

"Leave that to me," Francesca replied promptly. By this time she had recovered sufficiently to command an air of deep guile. "I know how to arrange matters with the American consul at Genoa. As for the disguise," she added innocently, "I think I might pass very well as a girl—don't you?"

XXII

IN less than six hours' time Naples had become a hideous nightmare of iniquity and terror that, like a vast storm-cloud, inky and louring, lurked just down the southern horizon from which the Farusi motor-car was madly racing through the sun-drenched beauty of Campanian hills.

It could not move too swiftly, too great a space could not be put between her and that city of abominable night. Yet Francesca knew neither distance nor remorse would ever serve to free her soul from the bondage of that lothly incubus into which she had sold it. She saw herself a lost woman.

She could never forget, dared not if she could—for the Camorra would not. Never again might she hold herself wholly her own mistress so long as, back there in Naples, in that forbidding palazzo in the black heart of that hideous quarter, he lived on, that "Old One" who shared her secret and who had bought all her freedom of will and thought and action at the meagre cost of his complaisance. Henceforward his word and wish would be her only law, or she must walk all her days in fear, knowing that at any moment retribution might be meted out to her, that justice of the Camorra in which mercy has never any part.

Neither was the girl any way comforted when she saw Italy take on the semblance of a purple cloud upon the face of the waters, a mist that dwindled, faded, grew more tenuous, and vanished astern, as the *Dante Alighieri* rolled out from Genoa into the Mediterranean. For if

she was leaving behind the land where the Camorra had generated and gained its rankest growth, she was bound for another whose soil had proved only too hospitable to the transplanted seeds of its vicious doctrines.

It was anything but a pleasant voyage for Francesca. She was for the first time in months without a confidant, Madame Farusi having said farewell to her in Genoa, while Marcella had gone on by rail to Cherbourg to catch a faster boat; due to arrive in New York three days before Francesca, the servant was fully instructed as to the arrangements she must make.

So the girl, if once more herself in name and dress, was without distractions, restless and ill at ease in mental and spiritual isolation. She made few acquaintances on shipboard and cultivated none, devoted too much time to melancholy brooding and introspection, and recognized nothing cheerful in all the world until, one fine morning, from the deck of the steamship trudging up the Bay, she saw the storied peaks and pinnacles of Manhattan lifting up out of iridescent haze across the blue, the city of a dream at dawn, and learned how beautiful it is to come home to one's own people after far wanderings in exile.

In the course of the next few days a young man began to be noticed in Little Italy, going modestly to and fro with a light of eager curiosity in his eyes, an amiable and well-favoured youth, not at all averse to making friends, who gave his name as Luigi Barocco and claimed close cousinship with the Neapolitan family of that name. Unquestionably there was a resemblance . . .

To the inquisitive he related that he had lived most of his life with his parents, the proprietors of an Italian restaurant in London; but they had recently died, and Luigi, journeying to Naples to rejoin his kinsfolk, had become the victim of misfortune (he did not care to be more specific) which had rendered advisable his emigration to America. He was not without means, but frugal

after his kind and, having fallen in with an ancient aunt several stages removed, was for the time being quartered with her in a common two-room tenement flat. And who of Italy should think the worse of him for that?

As for the question of making a living, he was in no hurry, his plans were at present nebulous, he purposed taking his time to look round and acquaint himself with conditions in this weird new world before dedicating his talents definitely to any specific line of endeavour. Of course, if anything promising were to present itself immediately, as something might at almost any time, since he was armed with letters of introduction to several influential gentlemen of Italian birth resident in New York, men of honour every one . . .

The term was not lightly used, in admiration or by way of flattery; it meant more than the mere surface of the words conveyed, especially to ears of Neapolitan education. The Society of Camorra countenances no resignations from its ranks, but it looks indulgently upon those who have vision enough to perceive that respectability pays; so not infrequently the "man of heart" who ranged the streets of Naples ready for any mischief becomes a "man of honour" when he takes out naturalization papers in America, takes no more active part in the affairs of the Honourable Society, devotes his energies to the task of building up a good social and a solid business reputation, keeps a close mouth, and serves old associations only passively for the most part, while remaining always subject to the call of the Camorra in time of need or stress.

Aniello Barocco, for example, had turned "man of honour" even before leaving Naples; and it is probable that his brother Liborio had fostered designs upon that estate in his American beginnings.

Luigi Barocco, the newly landed, presented his letters all in a single day; and in every instance they earned him a welcome of gratifying warmth.

Admirably simple letters they were, in point of phraseology, cunningly worded as to convey little or nothing to one familiar with the Italian language but ignorant of the extensive use of metaphor in the cant of the Camorra. Francesca herself had been not a little perplexed by this seeming innocence of expression, unable to understand how the letters could be as informative and persuasive as they must to serve her ends. But she had not long to wait to learn that they told more than they pretended to. "To be kissed by strange men is no longer any novelty to me," she told Rodney demurely—"on the cheeks and forehead, at least."

And it was surprising how quickly her fame as a "man of heart" got about in Little Italy. The reputed destroyer of Carabinieri remarked that she was hailed with effusive warmth by the few who had already come to know her, as she walked home to her tenement lodging that evening, and that utter strangers more often than not saw fit to salute her with respect or give her the sidewalk when they passed. And she had just sat down to supper with Marcella when a knock introduced the favourite *picciott'* of the local capo maestra, an ingratiating young assassin with the face of a rat and a lithe, sinewy body closely encased in store clothes of extreme cut and violent colouring.

His boss, he announced, desired ardently to make the acquaintance of the redoubtable personage who had been living so unpretentiously in the Italian colony for several days. If Luigi Borocco would take the trouble to be at home at ten o'clock that night, one would call to conduct him to the customary place of meeting.

Francesca promised to be waiting at the hour appointed, and returned to her interrupted meal, but had no appetite to finish it. Now that she drew near the goal of her long and arduous endeavours, she found herself a prey to unmasterable agitation, torn this way and that by hopes and fears.

All this while she had seen nothing of Angelo, heard nothing of him save in the way of casual comment upon her likeness to her "cousin," a resemblance which she had been at pains to modify as much as possible, not without fair success. It really wasn't a difficult matter to avoid Angelo's personal tricks of speech and gesture, his slouching grace of carriage and normally petulant expression, the temper alternately sullen and domineering which coloured his personality with a certain, unmistakable, and ugly distinction. For the less she was reported to be like him, if gossip about Luigi Barocco were communicated to Angelo, the less likely he was to become suspicious and make it his business to find out for himself about this newcomer from Naples.

Indeed, Francesca insisted, it had never entered her head to impersonate her brother till the uproar in the hallway led her to open the door and see Rodney being trampled to death by that pack of murderous piccotti.

"But I knew then," she said, "I had been wrong in assuming Angelo had not made himself a power in Little Italy. You would never have been attacked, I felt sure, except by his orders. I couldn't doubt he had been watching the house when he saw you enter it and had given the word not to let you leave it alive. So I knew only Angelo could save you. It seemed hardly probable that they'd accept me as Angelo, seeing me come out of Luigi's flat, but it was worth trying and—I couldn't think of anything else. So it was with my very best imitation of Angelo that I interfered, and—it worked.

"Not till afterwards did I remember that, if Angelo had been watching the house, it must have been for a purpose with which you hadn't anything to do, because you had come there by the sheerest accident. In other words, it must have been me whom Angelo was watching. And how long had he been doing that? And why? Why hadn't he come to see me and have it out?

“Knowing as I did how quickly he goes half out of his mind when he’s frightened about himself, how irresponsible he is at such times, I don’t mind admitting I was in a blue funk. I know now how a mouse feels when a cat is playing with it.”

XXIII

FRANCESCA paused to study Rodney's face for a moment, her brows knitted in half-humorous apprehensiveness, in her eyes a twinkle of mischief ingenious and speculative.

"You little know," she resumed, "how narrowly you escaped being kissed tonight, when that taxi stopped! But if you'll take my word for it, Rodney, you had a very close call. . . . But only," she amended in haste, as the young man sat up sharply—"only out of self-pity and—if you must know—the shamefullest cowardice."

Rodney sank back with a rueful laugh. "Might've known there'd be a catch in it somewhere," he complained. "It sounded too good to be true—it was."

"But I was so wretchedly scared and sorry for myself," the girl protested. "And I didn't dare let you see, or even suspect, or you'd never have let me go back alone, I shouldn't have been able to go to that meeting, all my intriguing, the labour and worry of months, everything would have gone for nothing. So I simply had to deceive you, Rodney, screw my courage up to the last notch, put a bold face on it, pretend there was really nothing afoot you could reasonably fret about. And that made me feel so frightfully noble and Spartan, you know, I could have howled in appreciation of the heroic figure I was cutting, going forth to meet my fate, whatever it might be, with a spirited toss of the head and a brave smile on my young lips, when I wanted nothing so much as to be held back by a masterful hand and—and be made a fuss over. . . . What with vanity and imagination always at work in us, it's a wonder we're not greater idiots than we are—isn't it, Rodney?"

"There's only one living being can call you an idiot in my hearing and get away with it."

"But when I do, you'll agree?"

"Well!" Rodney submitted, "it isn't manners to contradict a lady. And besides, you ought to know best. You knew what you were going to do, when you insisted on leaving me, this evening—I didn't."

"Neither did I, really. I had an inkling, of course; but if I'd guessed precisely what was in store, I don't believe I'd have had the nerve to go through with it."

The encounter with Rodney and the troublesome problems it provided, of how to get him out of harm's way and cheat his jealous solicitude, had so delayed the girl that she got back to her tenement lodging via the backyards and fire-escape (praying fervently she had not been noticed in her furtive passage through the streets) in time to be welcomed by impatient knocking at the hall-door. Nor could she guess how long that had been going on; judged by its tempo, more than a few minutes . . .

Thanking her stars for the foresight which had instructed Marcella not to return to the flat before midnight, Francesca hastily slipped out of her coat and low shoes, tore off collar and necktie, lay down on the bed—which, as she had foreseen it would, remonstrated with loud squeaks—and promptly got up again. Then she unlocked the hall-door and presented a drowsy face to three who were waiting there, the picciotto whose acquaintance she had made earlier in the evening, and two others of his kind—wiry, corrupt and deadly types of the Italo-American Camorristi, "gangsters" or "gunmen" in the vocabulary of police reporters.

Her heart quaked with dread inspired by the obvious significance of this veritable guard of honour, when she had expected only the picciotto for her guide. Apparently her impersonation of Angelo had served for the time being only; she told herself she had been a fool

ever to have hoped for better luck. Now she was clearly suspect. And if she clung to any doubt as to that, she had the look of the picciotto to undeceive her, the malice and distrust that glimmered in his slotted little eyes and curled back his upper lip from two projecting yellow teeth.

"What t'ell's th' matter wid youse? We must of been knockin' fi' minutes. Where yuh been anyway?"

"Asleep—just now waked up."

The mouth of a rat was twisted by a skeptical sneer.

"Uh-huh. I guess that's a hot one, too. Where's the guy yuh pulled in here a while ago? What yuh done with him?"

"Why!" said Francesca pleasantly, as she turned back and lighted the gas, "he's gone, a good while ago. What about it?"

The three gangsters shouldered into the room, and one closed the door while Francesca nonchalantly sat down on the edge of the bed and pulled on her shoes again, looking up with an amiable, enquiring smile.

"Aw! nothin'—only you got some tall explainin' to do to the patron—"

"The capo maestra?"

"Uh-huh—why yuh butted in and what yuh done with that bird he wanted beat' up."

"Well," said Francesca coolly, rising and donning collar and tie: "I daresay I can satisfy him, if it comes to that." Sometimes it was a bit difficult to remember that Luigi Barocco had learned his English in London and knew nothing of the dialect of New York's East Side; one had to watch one's tongue carefully. "How could I know he was interested in that man—the capo maestra? Nobody told me anything, and I haven't been in this country long enough to know all your faces by heart. I thought they were Mafiusi, those boys who were beating the man. As for the man, I mistook him for one who had been friendly with me on the steamer,

coming over. When I found I was wrong, he begged on his knees to be let out the back way, so I showed him the fire-escape—and got this for doing it.”

She displayed an exultant grin and a sizable roll of bills.

“Anyway, I don’t believe you, or the capo maestra either, will see that man in this neighbourhood soon again. If you ask me, he’s had enough. If I hadn’t interfered when I did, he’d have been killed.”

She shrugged into her coat and pulled her cap down over one eye. The picciotto had an incredulous grin.

“Maybe the boss ’ll swallow it, the way you tell it,” he doubted. “I’m glad it aint me has got to spill it to him.”

Francesca lifted a negligent shoulder.

“After all, it’s my affair, not yours, isn’t it? Ready?”

They went out.

In the streets two of her escort kept close to her elbows, while the picciotto walked behind: an arrangement that told the girl clearly enough she could consider herself virtually under arrest, a prisoner of the Camorra proceeding under guard to the place of judgment. The taciturnity of those two between whom she walked was in itself enough to prove she was in deep disfavour with the Honourable Society to which their allegiance was pledged. To her tentative overtures they returned grunts or monosyllables, of their own initiative they ventured nothing. If it was necessary to instruct her as to a turning, she received a nudge of the shoulder from the guard on the offside, nothing more. But she didn’t mind, the strengthening of the story she had fabricated to satisfy her companions gave her enough to think about.

A longish walk, something more than a mile by her reckoning, carried them in a southeasterly direction well beyond the southern bounds of Little Italy, and brought them at length to a quiet block of old brick houses running down to the East River; a neighbourhood so middle-

class and decorous that, Francesca noticed, there was not another person visible between the avenue corner and the iron fence which closed the thoroughfare at its far end. Beyond this black water ran sibilant in the stillness, tugs hooted like lost souls, the lights of a nondescript vessel could be seen moving slowly toward the Sound; and across a vast gap of darkness the street lamps of a Long Island community patterned the night like a multitude of pinheads, silver and gold, in a drop of black velvet.

The breath of salt water was strong and sweet. Somewhere a stray cat mewed, and Francesca, remembering Naples, shivered. Neither did she find it reassuring when another mew sounded close at her heels, and she realized that her rear guard was answering a preconcerted signal; for the first mewing promptly was suspended, and they proceeded in a silence broken only by the noise of their own footfalls.

In front of the very last house on the north side of the street the two at her sides fell back, and the picciotto, touching Francesca's elbow, turned in through the area-way. He had a key to a door of iron grating under the stoop, and admitted himself and Francesca to a basement hallway redolent of garlic and lighted by a single electric bulb. Then he knocked respectfully on the first door and opened it when a strong Italian voice bade them enter.

"I have brought the novice, *si masto*," he announced in Neapolitan, as Francesca passed through. He followed, shut the door, set his back to it, lighted a cigarette.

In a stuffy little dining room, round a table covered with red-and-white chequered cloth, three men sat at pause in a game of cards: all types unmistakably of Neapolitan or South Italian origin, and all in shirt-sleeves, otherwise a lot as oddly assorted as could have been wished.

One was a thin, dark, dyspeptic wreck of a man of fifty, with a ragged and grizzly moustache, mildly an-

guished eyes, and a ready smile of nervous humility; his clothing cynically threadbare. Over across from him sat his antipode, a great obese bulk of flesh with a face radiantly good-natured—if one overlooked its cruel and sensual mouth.

The third was like neither, but a substantial figure, a man strikingly handsome in the Latin style, grave and urbane of bearing. A great diamond, like a splinter of the sun, shone on one of his little fingers; and every detail of his dress was in the key of florid taste humoured by wealth. To him the attitude of the others was deferential to the last extreme: plainly at least the local capo maestra, if not capo intesta of the Camorra in New York . . .

He was the first to break a fairly long space of silence, during which Francesca's "Luigi Barocco" had to withstand the gruelling scrutiny of those three pair of eyes, none of which, so far as she was competent to judge, showed any sign of bias in her favour.

At length the question came in Italian, in a voice of full tone, well modulated but dispassionate: "You call yourself Luigi Barocco?"

"It is my name, si masto."

"How did you get that name?"

"But naturally—by being born Barocco and christened Luigi."

"Understand me: I wish precise information concerning your parentage and personal history."

"Willingly, si masto." Obediently Francesca recounted the major points of her fictitious biography, with some uneasiness observing that the nervous little man was jotting down notes in a pocket memorandum-book. "But," she concluded, "all this is no news to you since, undoubtedly, you are familiar with the letters from Italy which have procured me the honour of this interview."

"It is true," her catechist admitted: "we have seen certain letters, otherwise you would not be here. I need hardly say to you that only those who have done the

Honourable Society some conspicuous service such as these letters mention would have been invited to meet us here tonight. Nevertheless, Naples is far away, and what you did there has little weight with men of heart here, where here you have done much, Luigi Barocco, to counterbalance the good impression made by the letters you speak of, by interfering in an affair with which you had properly no concern."

"So I have been given to understand, *si masto*," Francesca replied with a good appearance of regret. "But how was I to know?"

She repeated her specious defense of her conduct in rescuing Rodney, throwing in for good measure a few persuasive details which had occurred to her on the way from the tenement.

"The man was nothing to me, when I found he was not my friend; those who had been beating him were nothing, also. I did not know one face among them all. Certainly nobody made one sign or sound to tell me it was an affair of the Camorra. And when the man I had saved offered me money"—she showed the roll of bills again—"to get him away safely—why! naturally, I saw no reason why I should hesitate to earn my first American dollars. In fact, I thought it a good beginning for my life here."

She wound up with her most ingratiating smile; but the fat man, she noticed, was looking bored, the man of nerves was at best not prejudiced in her favour; only the spokesman seemed, as from the first, soberly impartial.

"It may be true, what you tell us," he gave his verdict. "At the same time, it is a matter affecting the honour of the Camorra less than the personal interests of one of our brothers. I mean, it was his private affair you interfered with, and you have your peace to make with him; if he rejects your explanation, then you must give him the satisfaction every good Camorrista owes another

whom he has wronged or injured, even though unintentionally. Am I right, signori?"

The question was addressed to the fat man and the thin, both of whom hastened to voice hearty endorsement of this just judgment.

As for Francesca, she knew now she was to see Angelo again before the night was over.

"In the meantime, and in the absence of the comrade to whom I have referred"—the speaker consulted an ornate watch of platinum, wafer-thin, edged with diamonds—"he should have been here an hour ago—I see no reason why we should not proceed with the business for which we have been called together, according to the wishes of the Supreme Master as communicated by letter. And you, Luigi Barocco—are you prepared?"

"I am ready, si masto," Francesca quietly replied.

"Then let us proceed. 'Tonio!'"

The picciotto promptly tapped Francesca on the shoulder, opened the door, slouched out.

The girl followed without hesitation, at least with none she dared show. Even to herself, for that matter, she seemed curiously composed, though the way she trod might easily lead to death. One little slip to betray her sex must be fatal, since women are debarred from membership in the Camorra and, should one seek to violate this rule and become intimate with its secrets, the assumption is implicit that she is acting as a spy or potential informer, the punishment swift and sure.

Or, it might be, Angelo was to prove her undoing. She understood that he was expected at any moment. What he might say or do when he discovered his sister, in masquerade as a man, being initiated into full membership passed Francesca's powers of prevision. His anger she could foresee and discount, but never what outlet it might find in action, especially if he were guilty, as she feared, of that treachery which had decreed the death of their father and uncle.

Terrified, she nevertheless went on without a falter, her bearing confident, her thoughts collected. Only she noticed a dryness in her mouth, the palms of her hands were sweating . . .

The three who had put her through that perfunctory interrogation bringing up the rear, the little procession moved to the back of the basement hallway, then down a short, dark flight of steps. Here the picciotto stopped and rapped. Panels of sheet metal gave sounding response. Seven times he knocked, by Francesca's count, with a brief pause between the fourth and fifth strokes. Then a door swung on creaking hinges, a wave of dank air rolled out, heavy with smell of mould, the picciotto announced in dramatic Italian:

"Signori of the High Council, the Tribunal brings you a novice."

And docile to a tug at her arm, Francesca passed him and entered the cellar.

Eight men were waiting there, ranged in a wide circle round a table in the middle of the bare cement flooring. With Francesca and the Tribunal added, the room harboured twelve; for the picciotto was not numbered among these elect.

A solitary electric bulb, affixed to a beam and stagily shaded with paper of a morbid cerise hue, cast a lurid light directly down upon the table; the rest of the room and the faces of the High Council were hideous in its funereal, purplish penumbra.

A pair of hands dropped upon Francesca's shoulders from behind and pushed her forward into the brighter radius of illumination, then fell away. The door closed with a hollow clang, a stillness fell in which Francesca grew conscious of a muted lisping and lapping which reminded her that the house stood directly upon the river, whose waters doubtless washed the foundations when the tide was high.

She scanned in fearful curiosity those countenances

which she could see without turning her head. They told her nothing. Angelo's was not among them; still he might be standing behind her, for all she knew. For that matter, none of the faces was familiar to her vision, though the light was tricky enough to mislead the keenest, and recognition, if any had been possible, was made more difficult by the fact that each man, as if in obedience to some ritual provision, stood with arms folded upon his bosom and head bended so that his features were in shadow.

She looked down at the table. Upon its naked deal top several objects were laid out, a singular and by no means reassuring assortment: a knife of the kind known to the Camorra as *triangolo*, two of the 'o zumpafuosso type, a straw-swaddled wine flask, a goblet of chased silver, a lancet, an automatic pistol with its magazine clip and cartridges disassembled.

The silence was so prolonged, after the door had closed, that the girl, conceiving it to be maintained solely with the object of impressing her with the solemnity of the occasion, grew impatient, rather, with the silliness, the stupidity of it all. Yet she dared not let this be seen, she disciplined herself to endure, to ape the stolidity of a red Indian, lest the confession of an imperturbability less absolute blemish her pretensions to a place in this peerage of men of honour and of heart.

For all that, she could not control a start when, after this ordeal of waiting had lasted nearly ten minutes, a thunderous knock on the metal door, followed by six more, set hollow and inhuman echoes a-bellow.

Bolts were drawn, there were mutterings at the door, inarticulate in her hearing. Then it was made fast once more, silence resumed its sway.

But it no longer mattered to Francesca, no imaginable circumstance could have seemed comparable in her understanding with the knowledge, which she had just gained, without looking, without hearing one familiar accent, but

solely through that sensitive psychic affinity which bound their souls together with bonds unbreakable, that her brother had come in and taken his place in the circle at a point immediately behind her, but so near that he could have touched her by stretching out a hand.

More than this, Francesca knew that Angelo had recognized her instantly, in spite of the fact that he could not have seen her face, in spite of her disguise.

Idle the attempt to trick the instinct which had been born in them, bred in them as they lay together ere they were born . . . that implacable rapport which was none the less so strangely destitute of sympathetic affection.

For, in that brief pause which followed the arrival of Angelo, the girl was conscious of his hatred issuing from him in great waves of dynamic energy to beat upon and envelop her, body and soul, as with ethereal flames of malice.

XXIV

A VOICE of sonorous timbre, issuing from a source which Francesca could not at first locate, with startling abruptness boomed out a question:

"Name this candidate."

In the answer—"Luigi Barocco"—she identified the voice of the spokesman of the Tribunal which had received her.

"Name his sponsor."

"The Supreme Master of the Honourable Society of Camorra."

A stir ran round the circle, giving warrant for an inference that many of those present had been summoned to the meeting without being given specific information as to its occasion.

"What says Supreme Master concerning this candidate?"

"That he is an orphan, born of parents known to be well-disposed toward the Honourable Society; that soon after their death in London, this Luigi Barocco repaired to Naples to offer himself to the Society; that while preparations were being made for his initiation as picciotto d'honore, he distinguished himself by shooting dead three out of four Carabinieri who had been charged with the arrest of a good Camorrista known to you all, Tobia Basile; that in consequence of this signal proof of devotion and zeal, the candidate was constrained to leave Naples secretly and in haste; and that in reward therefor the Supreme Master requires us to receive him into full membership here, remitting the customary term of probation as novice."

"Is there question as to the authenticity of the Master's letter?"

"None. There were in all five letters, all in the same tenor and each describing the applicant minutely. Each, furthermore, was sealed with the personal seal of the Supreme Master himself."

"If that is so, and the Council approves, there need be no more delay."

A murmur of assent was audible. A man came from behind Francesca and, placing himself on the far side of the table, addressed her directly in the voice which had uttered the preliminary questions, a man of no particular distinction of person, aside from eyes which, in the baleful glow of the cerise-shaded bulb, held a flickering glare like shadows of hellfire.

"Luigi Barocco!"

"Si masto!" the girl responded.

"Knowest thou the conditions, what thou must do to become as a brother to men of heart and honour?"

"I am here to be instructed."

"Thou must be prepared to endure misfortune upon misfortune and to lay down thy life, if need be, that the life of a brother may be spared."

"I am so prepared."

"Thou must hold sacred the secrets of the Camorra—and God have mercy upon thee if thou dost traffic with spies and traitors!"

"It is but just that the penalty of 'nfamita should be death."

"Thou must observe the Omertà and the Frieno, be honourable in all thy dealings with thy brethren in the Honourable Society and humble toward the High Council, obeying without dispute or hesitation all orders, though they send thee to thy grave."

"I have no ambition higher than this, si masto, to honour with my life the Omertà and the Frieno."

"Shouldst thou see one, were it thine own father, attack or stab a member of the Honourable Society, thou art bound to defend him even though it be at the cost of

slaying thy father—thou shalt own no kinsman closer than thy brethren of the Camorra.”

“The Honourable Society shall be to me as my father and my mother, my wife and my children.”

“Adversity shall be thy lot, and the fear, enmity and hatred of all mankind except they be members of the Camorra.”

“Did I fear adversity and hardships, *si masto*, I should not have troubled the Honourable Society.”

“Should one of thy brethren seek to kill thee, and be brought by the police to the bedside where thou liest dying, thou shalt say to his captor: ‘I do not know this man.’”

“And if he come alone, then I shall say to him: ‘If I live, I will kill thee; if I die, I forgive thee.’”

“Take that pistol, Luigi Barocco—load it.”

Slowly, that her nerves might not betray her in hands of bungling haste, Francesca took up the magazine clip, fitted into it the six deadly little cylinders of brass tipped with lead, then inserted it into its socket in the grip of the weapon.

“Give it to me.”

The man with the smouldering eyes took the pistol, drew back its slide, simultaneously cocking it and chambering a cartridge, and returned it to the girl.

“Put it to your head.”

She dared not demur, she felt the chill mouth of metal lip her temple.

“Pull the trigger!”

Francesca shut her eyes, that their appeal might not be read, and with a silent prayer tightened the pressure of her finger on the trigger. The hidden hammer clicked upon a dead cartridge . . .

She heard a subdued rumour of admiration, and reopened her eyes with a sense of daze in her relief: she had known that it would be thus, and yet . . .

“Put the pistol down, bare your right arm.”

Francesca rolled back her coat sleeve to the elbow, then unbuttoned and turned back the cuff to her shirt.

"Give your arm."

She extended it across the table. With the lancet the man delicately slit the skin of the forearm above a vein. A few drops of blood welled out and dripped into the silver goblet. Then Francesca's wrist was released, she wrapped a handkerchief round it, over the wound, and readjusted her cuff and sleeve.

"Drink," the inquisitor commanded, offering the goblet filled to the brim with wine from the straw-bound flask.

Francesca set the vessel to her lips and returned it. The man drank a little of the mixture and gave it back to her again.

"Offer it to each of the brethren in turn," he enjoined her. "If one refuses, thou art rejected by him and must fight him."

He indicated the brace of deadly duelling knives upon the table, the 'o zumpafuossi.

Strengthened by a belief that the worst was over, Francesca took the goblet blindly to the nearest Camorrista. He sipped and handed it back, and spoke to her by name, as Luigi Barocco, calling her comrade. She passed on to the next, the next and the next. Angelo was fifth in line.

He seemed strangely remote from her, his twin sister, even though scarcely a yard away, strangely a stranger in her sight and understanding, as he waited there in a stare of hate and fear.

The hatred in his gaze was undisguisable, his fear she divined as she paused before him, proffering the cup of blood and wine. His eyes glassy and unwinking, sweat standing out upon his forehead, veins in his temples blue with congestion, his features drawn and set in a mirthless grin: Angelo was afraid of her, afraid to the very marrow of him.

He made no move to take the goblet, and Francesca was aware, as clearly as if his mind had been her own, of the frightful struggle going on in him.

To refuse would precipitate the duel prescribed by inexorable ritual, in which Angelo might be successful in so wounding or maiming Francesca that she would be forced to abandon her purpose, or at least would remain hors de combat long enough to permit him to strengthen his defenses or plan some promising counterstroke, something that would make her hesitate and think, perhaps give up altogether.

On the other hand, a misjudged blow might deal a mortal wound, which he dared not risk for the very reason that bound him to refrain from denouncing his sister then and there, exposing her imposture: for the reason that her death would follow, as night follows day, and . . . his twin would not die alone.

Shaking as with palsy, his hands lifted, took the cup, carried it to his lips . . .

XXV

AND that's about all there is to tell," Francesca announced, with an unsuccessful effort to snub a yawn—"I mean, all worth telling."

"Oh, no!" Rodney reproachfully insisted.

"Well! I can hardly offer more substantial proof of my claim that I got away without too much trouble—none at all from Angelo, in fact. I'm not sure," the girl laughed, "I wasn't a bit disappointed in that precious brother of mine; I had looked for more spirit in him, I confess. I'm afraid the famous 'baroque' strain in the Barocci isn't what it used to be—if it ever was!"

"But surely the business didn't end there."

"Oh! naturally, I had to go through with a lot more nonsense. But I didn't mind, I'd been too well repaid to care. When Angelo took that cup and drank, I knew I had nothing more to fear from him, at least for the time being. I'd won, I was actually in the Camorra, a full-fledged member, free to pry into all its secrets, and not even Angelo could say me nay; free to come and go in all its haunts without fear; and not only that, but armoured with the assurance that every other Camorrista in New York, excepting only Angelo, would come to my aid if ever there were any need. The first woman in the history of the organization, I suppose . . ."

"Good Heavens, what courage!"

"I wouldn't call it that," Francesca objected. "I knew how it would be with Angelo, all along, that he wouldn't dare expose me, or attempt anything against me—he thinks too much of his own skin. So I don't see how I

can lay claim to having accomplished anything that called for any qualities but cheek and cussedness."

"Of course not!" Rodney murmured with sarcastic intention.

She ignored the interjection. "But if you must know, I went on round the circle with the cup; and when it had been drained by the twelfth man—he actually seemed to like that awful mixture!—I had to go round once again, this time to be kissed. And I must say, Rodney, I don't find promiscuous kissing all that's claimed for it; and you'll admit I've had a lot of experience. Think of being kissed forty-eight times in a single night."

"In Heaven's name—!" Rodney expostulated.

"Four times by each man: once on each cheek, the accolade; once on the forehead, the kiss of congratulation upon my elevation to full standing; and finally, once full on the lips, the kiss of brotherhood. My first acquaintance with *that* sort; I don't remember that Angelo ever liked me well enough; but I can assure you, Rodney, that if I ever should cultivate a whim for caresses, it won't be for the brotherly variety."

"You mean to tell me even Angelo—!"

Francesca nodded vigorously. "Even Angelo; but he didn't perform as if he really cared for the sport. Some of the others were perfunctory enough, but Angelo's kisses were the most cynical makeshifts imaginable."

"But what did he say?"

"Not a word. He didn't have to say anything, for that matter; I knew what he was thinking, and he knew I knew. And then, as if kissing his own sister had been too much, he quietly vanished. The ceremony ended with the kissing-bee, and then the others crowded round me, slapped me on the back, offered me wine and cigars, told me what a brave fellow I was, and insisted on having the full story of my glorious exploit in Naples; and while I was busy trying to invent details bloodthirsty enough to satisfy them, without giving myself away as a simple

young person who'd never murdered anything but mosquitoes—Angelo slipped out when I wasn't looking."

"How soon did you find out—?"

"Right away. I *felt* his absence, even if my back was turned, just as I had felt his presence when he came in. It was some time before I managed to get away, and then he wasn't anywhere to be seen—he had actually forfeited the opportunity to waylay me and row and bluster! I don't mind telling you, that was so unlike Angelo, it frightened me more than anything, gave me furiously to think. I have learned to distrust Angelo's infrequent, amazing exhibitions of self-control; as a rule they mean he's nursing some scheme rather more fiendish than usual. It took all my courage to go home alone through those strange, midnight streets, where anything might happen, and open the door to that wretched hole of a flat."

"You found your brother there, of course," Rodney prompted as the girl passed into a fit of abstraction.

"No, I didn't," she replied; "and that only made it worse. Marcella was waiting up, and when she said nobody had been, I knew I had the worst to fear, the unforeseeable. And I was so panicky, I fled at once by the fire-escape again, and took Marcella with me—told her to go hide herself, and not as she valued life to show her face in public till I gave her leave. And then I came on here, because I'd promised, but kept careful watch all the way to make sure I wasn't followed. I don't believe there's any reason for worry, and yet . . ."

For a time she sat thoughtfully watching Rodney pace the room with nervous strides, frowning at its inoffensive rug and running fretful fingers through and through his hair.

"Rodney! what do *you* think?"

"Think!" To her infinite dismay the young man stopped suddenly and plumped down on his knees by the side of the chair, imprisoning her in it by passing an arm

across its arm. "I think you are the dearest, most wonderful woman that ever breathed. Incredible—that's the only word that fits you—incredibly brave and sweet and—daft!"

To her look of protest he nodded earnestly, but with a whimsical smile, partly impatient, partly indulgent, wholly tender. "Yes, daft! The dearest lunatic alive, and never more fit for an asylum than now, if you're flattering yourself I'll consent to your going ahead with this craziness, to your jeopardizing your life again with criminals who wouldn't hesitate an instant to stick a knife into you if they ever dreamed you were a woman. Don't ask it of me, dear—I couldn't! Twice I've let you have your own way, when I didn't know just what you were up to, though every instinct warned me I was wrong to trust you. But now I do know, it's out of reason to expect me to let you go on and blunder into more risks, greater dangers. I can't, I won't!"

"But Rodney!"—she dropped a hand upon his shoulder, holding him at arm's-length—"what can you do about it? If I choose to go my own way, how can you stop me? After all, I'm still mistress of my own actions, you know—"

"Still? But you won't be, not entirely, once we're married."

She laughed a little, wagging her head at him.

"Must I marry you, Rodney?"

"Yes," he doggedly said, refusing to be mollified.

"And give up all my freedom of will? surrender self-determination completely to your masterful domination? Is that the way you mean to treat your wife, Rodney?"

"Yes—when her life is at stake."

"Do you believe I could love a man who treated me as a child, domineered over me, insisted his will must be my law?"

"Yes—if you knew, as you would know, his love for you made him risk your anger to save you from harm,

perhaps from death, as the inevitable consequence of this vendetta mania. Oh! I love you more than I love life itself, but I'll chance your hatred rather than leave one thing undone to save you from yourself in this business."

"I could never hate you," she slowly said, still holding herself out of his arms by the hands that grasped his shoulders—"I love you too dearly, Rodney, to resent anything you could ever do for love of me. And I will marry you whenever you like, once my vow is fulfilled. But"—the look of fatality seemed to deepen, like a shadow cast upon the exquisite face that looked so tenderly into his—"you must let me go on, I can't stop now, I can't. I would if I could, Rodney; but something in my nature, something, I presume, handed down to me by ancestors to whom a vendetta was a holy thing, won't let me stop. Be patient with me a little; remember I'm at least half a woman of another race than yours, a Latin with an inheritance of primitive impulses and traditions as alien as a Patagonian's."

"Perhaps. Even granting all that, you remain a creature of reason. What in the name of reason can you hope to gain by carrying through this feud which you believe is imposed upon you by hereditary instincts stronger than your sense of right and wrong, stronger even than your love for me? Say you do push this business through to a conclusion: that means only one thing, that you'll have to denounce your own brother as a traitor to the Camorra—"

"You believe that—?"

"In your heart you know it's Angelo you're hunting; in your heart you believe it was he who gave the police the information that brought about that raid. Don't you?"

"I'm afraid so, but—"

"Well: say you find the proof you seek. Angelo will stick at nothing to stop your mouth. And if he fails—what then?"

"The Camorra will deal with him as it has always dealt with traitors."

"And the blood of your own brother will be upon your head."

"As the blood of his father and mine is on his!"

"You don't know that. You believe it because you have been taught that, through the relentless workings of some unknown law of nature, twins are fated to die simultaneously. You believe, because your uncle was shot in a police raid, presumably instigated by your brother's disloyalty, that your father's death at the same time was due to the same cause. But can you say it wasn't written your father would die when he did, whether his brother died or not, from that heart trouble from which he had been a sufferer for so many years? Are you prepared to assert he would have lived on after that night had there been no raid, no excitement, no shock of seeing his brother shot down before his eyes?"

The girl looked away, her head described a slight sign of negation.

"No: you can't say that," Rodney pursued. "You can't say you're not hounding Angelo on to assassination by the Camorra for a fault that wasn't his, a fault that Nature herself planted in your father's body to be his fate at the time he died, whatever the attendant circumstances. And even granting Angelo was wholly to blame and you are justified in seeking to make sure his punishment—what of me? Have I no standing in your consideration? Has my love for you no rights of its own?"

She stared, posed. "I don't understand . . ."

"Suppose you do find proof that Angelo was responsible, suppose you do give him up to the justice of the Camorra; then Angelo must die. And what of you, his twin? Do you hope to survive him, crediting as you do the superstition that twins must die in the same hour? Have I who love you, then, no right to protest, no reason to complain that you value my love so lightly you will

deny it, crown it with despair, rather than forego the savage satisfaction of a revenge unworthy of you, no matter what the provocation?"

Francesca slowly shook her head, her eyes soft with unshed tears.

"Oh, Rodney! what shall I say? You may be right—I don't know. I want to believe you are right—but ought I?"

"Is it so hard, then, to honour that divine injunction, '*Vengeance is mine*'?"

Her head dropped, her arms grew slack. He caught her to him, crushed her lips with his. She suffered him; and presently one of her hands stole upward and round his head . . .

XXVI

YOU will marry me?"

"Yes, O yes!"

"Tomorrow?"

He felt her lips tremble with the monosyllable of assent, but it was withheld.

"Tomorrow?" he persisted.

"I don't know . . ."

"Then when?"

"Very soon. You must let me think." She moved purposefully in his embrace. "Please, Rodney!"

He released her and sank back upon his knees, looking up to her with eyes of adoration as she made an effort, almost pathetic, to recover something of the poise and self-command she had lost forever in his arms, some of the independence she had ceded to his lips.

"Oh, Rodney!" she remonstrated, sitting flushed and lovely with starlit eyes—"it wasn't fair to carry me off my feet like that. What chance had I, when you added the eloquence of a lawyer to the extravagance of a lover? It wasn't kind to take advantage of my being madly in love with you at a time when I was faint with fatigue—now was it?"

"But you forgive—?"

"Do you truly repent?"

"Not one whit!"

"Then of course I forgive you."

She bent and swiftly kissed him once, then got upon her feet.

"But now you really must show me a little consideration, dear. I'm so tired I can hardly stand, so sleepy I don't know how I keep my eyes open." She consulted

a nickel-plated watch strapped to her wrist. "Why, it's after three!"

"Good Heavens!" he cried contritely, rising in turn. "I never thought—"

"Being a man, you wouldn't. But now you must. Please, Rodney, take thought quickly, tell me where to go for the rest of the night."

"You won't stir a step from these rooms. Why should you? Remember, you yourself pointed out it was eminently proper I should entertain young men of my acquaintance in my rooms after midnight. Besides, I can easily hop round the corner to the club and get me a room; while you'll be perfectly comfortable here, and safe. And in the morning I'll drop in for breakfast, if you don't mind, and afterwards we can have a talk and settle things."

"I don't know what to say," the girl demurred, not with much conviction. "It doesn't seem right to turn you out—yet I don't know where else to go."

"Don't tire yourself with worrying about something that's already settled. Sit down a minute while I make my room ready and pack up a collar-button."

Obediently Francesca subsided into her chair; and Rodney marched into his bedchamber, where he turned the light up and the bedclothes down, laid out a suit of pyjamas, slippers, and a dressing-gown, and hastily stuffed a small bag with a few things for his personal use.

But when he returned to the living-room, it was to find Francesca fast asleep in the armchair, so sound asleep she did not waken, but only sighed softly, when with infinite care he gathered the slight young body into his arms, bore it to the adjoining room, and put it down upon the bed.

Then he adjusted the shade of the bedside lamp to shield the face of fatality, turned to go, and hesitated, gazing in indecision at the stirless figure that rested in such sweet abandonment, its every line, for all that dis-

figuring investiture of man's clothing cheaply smart and ready-made, instinct with the unconscious grace and charm of a tired child.

"Oughtn't to risk waking her," he mused; "but she can't be comfortable very long, like that."

With hands of utmost delicacy he loosened the necktie, freed the slender, round throat from the confining collar, unlaced and removed the homely brogues from feet whose shapely slenderness should never have been libelled by any covering more substantial than silken slippers.

Satisfied he had done all he might to insure her comfort, he stood back, but still lingered, of two minds, doubt puckering his brows.

"No," he at length decided—"can't do it, mustn't leave her by herself. Anything might happen, she might wake up in a fright about something, and miss me . . ."

He stole back into the sitting-room, shut the communicating door, took off coat, necktie, collar and shoes, donned a dressing-gown over shirt and trousers, thrust his feet into travelling slippers, placed a chair so that the rays of the study lamp would fall over his left shoulder, filled and lighted a pipe, and sat down with the first book that offered itself; firmly determined to stay awake the night through.

Never tale was penned by mortal hand that could have caught and held his attention in that hour; try as he would and did, he could not make his mind grasp the sense of the printed text he scanned. Lines blurred and ran together beneath his dreaming eyes, the pages of the book became nothing better than a blank screen upon which, in endless succession, burned and faded the wild phantasmagoria conjured up by the story he had heard from Francesca's lips . . .

Heavy eyelids drooped, then his head; his breathing took on a measured tempo; against his will, without his knowledge, Rodney slept, and sleeping dreamed a dream, a horrible dream, horribly real and incoherent.

He dreamed that he woke up to find himself bound and blinded by the dark, helpless in strong and pitiless hands that, for all his struggles, held him fast and, lifting him up, bore him bodily a long way through the suffocating night to the brink of a pit and cast him down therein, into an everlasting pit of blackness fragrant with deadly perfume, wherein his body sank and sank, whirling giddily, while consciousness grew faint, guttered, and winked out like a candle in the wind . . .

A violent blow of an icy hand brought him back to life, a cruel blow above the heart that caused it to start and beat in spasms of intolerable pain.

He found himself standing, clawing empty air, fighting for breath like a man at the last moment rescued from death by drowning. Then his knees buckled and he would have fallen, but was caught and held up by friendly arms.

With another convulsive effort, Rodney made shift to support his own weight again.

Upon his dazed perceptions impressions beat like breaking waves, alternately smothering and subsiding.

Broad day, sunlight in the windows that made one's eyes ache, yet the study lamp and the electric bulbs in the sconces garishly aglow . . .

His head a theatre of throbbing pain, his heart hammering madly against its cage of ribs, each beat a savage agony, his mouth dry, hot, and flavoured with bitterness as of aloes, the air drawn in by labouring lungs heavy with the sickly-sweetish odour of that nightmare pit . . .

At length, lifting leaden eyes to the face of the man who was holding him up, without any emotion he recognized the superintendent of the building in which he had his room.

Then he saw before him Detective Sergeant Ritchey, singularly armed with a siphon of seltzer water, his amiable and homely countenance overcast with solicitude.

Ritchey's voice boomed like distant thunder:

"That's done it, Stiles. Feelin' better, Mr. Manship?"

Pretty far gone. Lucky for you we happened in when we did, or maybe you'd never 've waked up in this world again."

A strangely thick tongue rendered enunciation a business of great difficulty.

"Wha's—wha's matter? Wha's happen'?"

"You've been chloroformed; and if you ask me, the bird what done it done his damndest to put you away for keeps."

The detective set the siphon down, and took from the table some rags and a small sponge.

"You was dead to the world in your chair when Stiles here let me in with his pass-key—blindfolded and your hands tied with silk handkerchiefs, and this sponge full of chloroform held under your nose by a towel wrapped round your head. See?"

For a moment or two Rodney stared with blank and witless eyes. Then with a strangled cry—"Francesca!"—and an abrupt jerk he broke from the arms of the man Stiles, staggered over to the bed-chamber door, and threw it open.

Another cry and a bitter one trembled on his lips.

The bed-chamber was without a tenant.

Overwhelmed, he sagged limply against the jamb of the door—and Ritchey caught him as his senses failed.

XXVII

WHEN Rodney came back a second time from Limbo, he was again in the arm-chair, and a young physician of his acquaintance, a fellow-tenant of the apartment building, was bending over him anxiously, one hand taking his pulse, the other holding an empty hypodermic syringe.

"There!" he cried in triumph as he saw intelligence begin to dawn anew in the eyes of the patient—"all right now, Mr. Manship, nothing more to worry about, bed and quiet will do the rest. But you've had a close call, would have gone West for good if Mr. Ritchey here hadn't known enough to use that siphon."

Brain-matter seemed to be so much cotton-wool in which thoughts, memories, emotions, all lay bedded, struggling feebly but powerless to prevail against that shackling inertia.

Sensations nevertheless registered fitfully; one was by turns aware of a heart that laboured painfully, wet garments that clung clammily to one's ribs, dull gnawings of curiosity . . .

Rodney managed to articulate just one word: "Siphon—?"

"You'd been under chloroform so long, you were a dead man when they found you, would be still if Mr. Ritchey had delayed ripping off that towel round your head and squirting ice-cold seltzer water on the bare flesh above your heart. The shock of that started up the paralyzed heart-action, but you fainted soon after coming to, so they called me in. I've just shot a jolt of strychnine into you, and it won't be long now before you're as right as rain."

The physician stood back and nodded to the others.

"Better carry him in, undress him, and put him to bed at once."

If his optimism was as specious as that which is commonly dealt out to patients, the emergency spurred the recuperative powers of a sound constitution; it wasn't as long as might have been expected before Rodney was able to put Ritchey into possession of the essential elements of Francesca's story—revelations that sadly impaired professional imperturbability and in the end lifted the detective out of his chair and sent him plodding up and down the room with head bowed, a thoughtful frown clouding his brows, teeth worrying the inevitably moribund cigar-stump.

"Well!" he confessed, "I'm damned, sure am. I've heard a heap of fairy tales in my time, some of 'em true, too; but this puts the bee on the lot. That girl—!"

He stood a moment staring at Rodney.

"Take a henpecked man's advice, Mr. Manship, and don't never hitch up with one of that kind. A guy might's well spend his married life in a glass bowl, makin' believe he's a goldfish, for all the show he's got of keepin' anythin' to himself with a woman like that."

He resumed his march.

"It all fits in pretty," he mused, "what you been tellin' me—only some of it's news. About old Aniello Ansiello bein' alive, f'rinstance. It was one of Joe Petrosino's pet theories, that bird hadn't never croaked, but was layin' low somewheres and more a power in the Camorra than he'd been in the days when he was makin' the Eyetalian gov'ment eat out of his hand. But I always thought poor old Joe was sort of nutty on the subject. Makes me jealous to think what a goal some Eyetalian bull's goin' to score on the stren'th of the cable I'll be sendin' over before I do much else."

"Damn Aniello Ansiello!" Rodney interrupted petulantly from his pillow. "He can wait. But Francesca—"

Miss Barocco can't. If you let anything delay your finding that poor girl and setting her at liberty, Ritchey—!"

"Don't get in such a lather. If the little lady's anywhere to be found, I'll find her; if she's needin' help, she'll get it from me quicker'n from anybody else."

"If! You know damn well she needs help—"

"Excuse me, Mr. Manship: I don't know nothin' of the sort. On the face of it, of course, you'd think whoever hopped you in your sleep kidnapped her; but I ain't by no means sure. More I think about it, more it looks to me like she lit out on her own, prob'ly before the others blew in—if they was anybody but Friend Angelo on the job."

"What makes you think so?"

"Why, all the signs . . . To begin with, it was half-past seven when I called up Headquarters to report, and they told me you was tryin' to get in touch with me last night. I got the hunch right away they was somethin' wrong, and beat it around here—couldn't 've taken me more'n twenty minutes from where I was. I seen the lights burnin' through the windows, and when you didn't answer my ring I got Stiles to let me in: say in all, ten minutes more. As you know, you'd just passed out peaceful when we found you, hadn't been under chloroform more'n an hour, if that long. A solid hour of it would kill a horse. So it must 've been round seven you was found asleep, bound and blindfolded and given the gas. Funny it didn't wake you up; all you read in novels and papers about folks bein' chloroformed in their sleep and never knowin' what happened is plain bunk. The surest way to wake a man up from a sound sleep is to try to put him under an anaesthetic."

"I did wake up," Rodney said. "I distinctly remember fighting against the hands that held me, and the sickening smell of chloroform; but because I couldn't see, I laid it all to nightmare."

"That explains that, then. Now at seven o'clock it'd

been daylight sev'ral hours; and able-bodied young ladies, like you tell me Miss Barocco is, don't get carried off against their wills, through the streets of New York by broad daylight, without causin' a crowd to collect and obstruct traffic. It just can't be done. Why! if anythin' like that'd happened there'd be fifty eyewitnesses. Not only that, but look't this room. I guess we can safely say Miss Barocco wouldn't let herself be kidnapped without stagin' a fight that'd make the Dempsey-Carpenteeyay bout look like a cooked prelim. Notice any symptoms of a scrap like that? Besides, no man could have overpowered her single-handed."

"Rather not. But how do we know it was one man alone?"

"Stands to reason angel-faced Angelo didn't have any help on this job. He wouldn't dare run the risk of havin' any of his gang find out little sister had been playin' horse with the Camorra. If that ever got out, sister'd be croaked, and Angelo would get his simultaneous. At least, that's the way he figures it. . . . Nope; he came alone; and when he didn't find sister, like he'd looked to, he got peeved and took it out on you."

The detective clamped his teeth firmly on the cigar and resumed his plodding walk.

"But what I can't understand," Rodney complained, "is why Miss Barocco should have run away—if she did, as you insist—without leaving me a word."

"Oh! you'll hear from her before the day's out. She'll call up or somethin'. Prob'ly it was like this: she's too excited to sleep long, and wakes up and remembers somethin' important she wanted to do and maybe hadn't told you about. She figures it out if she wakes you up and tells you she's off on the war-path again, you'll put up one terrible holler; so, she tells herself, the sensible way is beat it and explain afterwards. Question is: What did she have on her mind?"

For some minutes he pursued his restless tramping

without interruption. Then the man in the bed announced:

"I can't seem to remember her saying anything that would account for her running away without notice this morning; unless—it may have been she was worried on account of that old nurse of hers, Marcella."

"Don't listen reasonable to me. It must've been a more powerful motive, somethin' big, to make her get up, worn out like she was, and leave you, knowin' how you'd worry."

"Well," Rodney reluctantly admitted, "there's always the chance she repented of having listened to me and allowed herself to be persuaded she was doing the wrong thing in following up her vendetta—"

"Had she promised she'd give it up?" Ritchey demanded, stopping at the foot of the bed.

"Can't say she had—not in so many words. But our understanding was implicit—"

"Son!" the detective interrupted in pained paternal patience: "you want to get cured of kiddin' yourself a woman ever means anythin' without she's promised. And then gen'ly they don't. Some of 'em will keep a promise if you hold her to it, and maybe Miss Barocco's that kind, I don't say she isn't; but no woman ever breathed that gave a whoop in Harlem for what you call an implicit understandin'. Nope: nor many men either."

Rodney rose excitedly on an elbow.

"Then you think—"

"Lie down!" Ritchey fairly barked. "You do like the doctor ordered, or I won't tell you what I think."

Rodney groaned, but had to give in; and the detective resumed his talk and walk at one and the same time.

"I think Miss Barocco let you con her into thinkin' maybe you was right, she'd better quit and leave things lay; and then she fell asleep, and after while woke up in the dark and thought it over cold; and it all come back to her then, the way she'd been feelin' about this thing

for months and months; and you ain't there to talk her out of it again. And presently she remembers somethin' she'd maybe overlooked—you know how it is when you wake up in the middle of the night and lie thinkin', things seems to sort of shift into new combinations and don't look like they did in the daytime at all. So she says to herself: 'If I do this and that, I'll 've pulled it off and made it a clean job; and I can, easy, s'long's there ain't nobody taggin' along to tell me I mustn't or maybe put in his oar and upset the applecart.' So she gets up quiet and does a swift sneak, and don't know nothin' about what happened to you after that. And when you hear from her again, chances are it'll all be over but the shoutin'."

"You may be right," Rodney agreed after thinking this over. "If you are, our plain course is to find Angelo. The trail of the man who betrayed Baroque Brothers to you is bound to lead her to Angelo sooner or later, so the way to find Francesca is to watch Angelo."

"What makes you think that?" Ritchey demanded, again pulling up to an abrupt standstill. "Who told you Angelo turned that dirty trick on his own father and uncle?"

"One doesn't have to be a detective sergeant, Ritchey, to put two and two together. Angelo had motive enough for a man of his low order of character, both incentive and opportunity. I know he suspected something was going to happen, because when I went to call on his father by appointment that night, I saw Angelo skulking on the Fifth Avenue corner, watching the house; and when he caught sight of me he all but took to his heels. And now he's in a panic because his sister threatens to denounce the informer to the Camorra. Why should he have been afraid of me that night? or of her now, if his conscience is clean?"

"Maybe you're takin' a lot for granted, Mr. Manship," Ritchey commented. "But I'll never say so, because you're right."

"It *was* Angelo!"

"Yop. Guess it's safe to tell you that much. I traced the tip-off back to him; and ever since I've been keepin' an eye on that bird. He don't like it, neither."

"No question about that. Did I tell you (no, don't think I've seen you since) his shyster lawyer, Mr. Leo Croce, called on me one day to protest against what he was pleased to term my persecution of his client? Angelo had found out he was being shadowed and naturally blamed it on me, his sister's representative in this country."

Ritchey grinned, gratified.

"Fussed him, did I? That's too darn' bad!"

"Coarse work, if you ask me."

"Oh! I don't know. They's two ways of shadowin' a suspect: you let him know it, or else you don't. The best way's a combination of both. If he knows it, it makes him jumpy and liable to foolish breaks; or else he gets to know his shadow by sight and wastes time framin' him; and when he sees how easy that is, he gets overconfident and pulls some raw deal and gets away with it to the Queen's taste, as far's the bull he's spotted is concerned. But that's gen'ly the time when the shadow he don't know about steps in and scores. That's the system I've been playin' Angelo on; and he'll be surprised when he finds out how much I know about his private business. I could tell you a lot of things . . . Did you know he's figurin' to leave the country?"

"No!"

"Yop. Or if he isn't, you can't believe in signs. He's been turnin' everythin' into cash, everythin' his father left but the house they used to live in and the shop on the corner; and they're on the market, the only reason they haven't been sold is because nobody's offered anythin' near the real value of the property. And a little while ago he put in application for a passport. He hasn't got it yet, though. And I haven't been able to find out what boat

he figures to sail on. If he's made a reservation it's prob'ly under an assumed name, and he won't take it up till the last minute."

"That's very interesting. Miss Barocco ought to know."

"She will, soon as she turns up again." The telephone shrilled in the sitting-room. Ritchey went to answer it, volunteering as he passed through the door: "If that's her now, I'll put her wise."

He was gone long enough for Rodney to work himself into a fever of impatience, but returned with an impassive countenance and the announcement: "Wrong number. At least, that's what the party claimed. I got a hunch maybe it was Friend Angelo callin' up to see if anybody'd answer. If nobody did, of course, it would be glad news for the undertaker. Anyway, I got the supervisor at Central and told her to trace the call if she could."

"Look here," Rodney suggested: "if you know so much about Angelo's habits, you ought to be able to locate that gang he sic'd on me last night."

"Line 'em up for you inside twenty-four hours, if you think you can identify 'em."

"No fear. They kept me too busy, while it lasted; it was dark there in that hallway, besides. But how about the lot that initiated Francesca? And the house by the river?"

"I could lead you there with my eyes shut. As for the 'Council' outfit, I've only been waitin' for a good excuse to round 'em up—it was no good without I could pin somethin' on them. But what Miss Barocco told you satisfies me it was them that was in with Liborio Baroque in the drug smugglin' game; and with that to go on I ought to be able to send the whole bunch up the river. Anyhow, it's up to me to start somethin' and see what happens. But the first thing is to get that cable off to Italy."

"Why bother about that, when you've got work so much more important to do here?"

"Depends on what you call important. You don't want

to forget, puttin' old Aniello Ansiello behind the bars is the first trick we've got to turn for the girl's sake. When we begin to get action on this info you just slipped me, he'll know somebody must've spilled the beans over here; and he's wise enough, believe me, to guess who and take steps accordin'ly. So if you don't want to have your fancy gunned up without notice by some wild-eyed Wop, you better let me fix the 'Old One' so's he won't be able to do nobody no more harm."

"Heaven knows I'm willing! But isn't there some way we can protect Francesca against attempts at retaliation—?"

"If the Camorra ever gets wise to who started the leak, the best thing your little lady can do is travel and keep on travelling for a good while. But let me play my hand my own way and nobody'll ever know. As soon as I've tied old man Ansiello's hands and put Angelo where he belongs, where he'll get his three square reg'lar and plenty light exercise to help him digest 'em—well! who's goin' to guess what ever become of Mister Luigi Barocco, that promisin' young immigrant from Naples? I and you won't spill the beans, and you can count on Angelo's keepin' his trap tight for fear they might get his little sister and make it 'Good night, nurse,' for him, too."

Ritchey consulted his watch and clamped a fresh cigar, which he did not light, between his teeth.

"I'll be on my way, now, if it's all the same to you—I mean, if you promise to lie quiet there and not do nothin' foolish till you hear from me."

XXVIII

RODNEY was at pains to promise neither to keep quietly abed nor to refrain from actions of a constructively lunatic nature, pending receipt of further word from Ritchey. In fact, he didn't believe he could keep such a promise, and had no intention of subjecting himself to the strain of trying.

Neither did Ritchey press the point, but to the contrary, having voiced his views of what under the circumstances would be common-sense conduct, serenely went about his business, as if quite confident that Rodney would comply with his wishes. But perhaps this was so only because Ritchey was the wiser of the two.

For if Rodney's mind was sorely troubled in consequence of having won and lost his love within twelve hours, the physical distress of having been severely man-handled, deprived of a fair quantum of sleep, and chloroformed to the brink of death, all in the same period, was desperately enervating. And if Rodney heard the outer door slam behind Ritchey in entire anticipation of being unable to lie still another minute, once alone he perceived that to get up and fuss about would be merely to paw the air with aimless gestures. For what *could* he do?

Lacking the slenderest clue to Francesca's whereabouts—more than the negative one inherent in the knowledge that she would certainly avoid returning to the tenement flat where "Luigi Barocco" had lived with his ancient "aunt," reckoning that Rodney would be sure to seek her there—to rise, dress, sally forth, and barge blindly to and fro in the streets of New York, on the off-chance of running across the girl or some trace that would lead to her, would be even more futile than to winnow the haystack for the needle of tradition.

There was, after all, nothing one could do but possess one's soul in such patience as one could command, and wait for word. Ritchey might be depended upon to do everything possible out of friendship for Rodney, and in the line of his duty, besides. While Francesca would surely not leave him to fret himself into a fever one minute longer than he must, longer than she needed to accomplish what she had set out to do, whatever that might be.

Provided, of course, Ritchey were right in his guess at the reason for her absence . . .

It was hard to believe that the girl could have gone of her own volition without leaving a message of some sort, a line or a word to comfort the man who loved her and whom (O thought of felicity incomparable!) she loved.

Still, there it was, the stark, incomprehensible fact that, apparently, she had done just that very thing; something which Rodney proved to his sorry satisfaction by getting out of bed (not without groans and imprecations, for he was stiff and sore all over) and padding barefoot round bedchamber and living-room in search of signs which Ritchey might have overlooked, but finding nothing either to aggravate or tranquillize the doubts which preyed upon his mind.

Other than the strange handkerchief, a silk bandanna, that had been used to bind his wrists, the sponge, and the towel which had been commandeered from his bathroom to aid in chloroforming him, nothing was out of order in the apartment. Neither did Rodney find anything whatever in the nature of a message . . .

And that Francesca had left of her own free will seemed to be proved not only by the absence of any indications of a struggle, but also by the fact that she had taken time to put on again the collar, tie and shoes which Rodney had removed, while she slept.

No: she had gone voluntarily, in her own leisure.

Simple thoughtlessness alone could account for such action, preoccupation with the enterprise which (accord-

ing to Ritchey's surmise) she had waked up in the night to conceive and act upon. Or else indifference! Or, it might be, repentance, regret for the impulsiveness which had moved her to pledge herself in a moment of emotional excitement?

A hateful thought, and one that Rodney, after the fashion of lovers in the absence of the one beloved, could by no means forget or reason out of mind. It was so possible, he argued. Who was he to have won the heart of a creature of such transcendent charms? Or to hold it! Who was he that she should not, on sober second thought, perceive her mistake and take hasty, furtive measures to mend it?

Appalled by the mere suggestion, Rodney crawled miserably back into bed to plague himself ill with it.

If lovers were reasonable creatures, they would not be lovers. It is well, then, for the welfare of the race, tolerantly to contemplate their aberrations.

Nor would they be lovers, of course, were they not human. And Rodney was so hopelessly and intensely human that, even while he writhed in the torments of the self-damned, exhausted nature asserted itself, he fell asleep.

This time no dream disturbed his slumbers. He was so well worn out, indeed, that he slept like one dead, unstimulating for hours on end; and three times while he slept the telephone in the next room (the door to which he had left open with precisely this contingency in mind) trilled and trilled unheard; and once, toward the end of that sultry day, two men entered, the superintendent Stiles again admitting Ritchey, and stood over Rodney and talked without trying to avoid waking him—and he slept sweetly on.

"Well! he needs it all right, if any guy ever did," Ritchey concluded. "And s'long's it's natural sleep, we should worry. Only when he didn't answer the 'phone, I begun to wonder if they'd maybe got to him again. I'll be

on my way—got a busy night ahead of me. Give him this when he wakes up, will you.”

He scribbled a brief message, sealed it in an envelope, and went his way.

In twilight, Rodney opened incredulous eyes upon his room again, glanced hastily at his watch, turned on the bedside lamp to make sure his eyes had not deceived him, swore fretfully, and tumbled out of bed.

Nevertheless he delayed to find slippers and gird on a dressing-gown before stumbling into the sitting-room. No telling who might not be there, waiting for him to wake up . . .

But there was no one..

A few minutes later the man Stiles appeared in response to agitation of the service bell.

“No, sir,” he reported—“nobody’s called today exceptin’ Mr. Ritchey. He come ’bout an hour ago—said he’d tried to get you on the ’phone, and you didn’t answer. He left this.”

Ritchey’s note was professionally terse:

“DEAR MR. MANSHIP: Just to say everything looks rosy. I look to have good news for you some time tonight, but I do not much expect to pull anything off much before 12 o’clock, so there is no sense you staying in, go to a show or something and do not worry, only be in around 12 M in case I call up.

“Yrs truly,

“WM. K. RITCHEY.”

And from a full heart Rodney damned the good man for his wholly commendable reticence.

It was towards eight o’clock and almost dark when he sought his club for dinner. Beneath a sky piled high with grim, forbidding thunderheads, like some dark genius of wrath and destruction shouldering up into the heavens from behind the Jersey hills and shadowing a doomed

world with the silent menace of its scowl, an atmosphere heavy with heat and humidity, motionless yet electrical with suspense, weighed without ruth upon the sweltering city. In this abnormal crepuscle street lights shone with morbid brilliance, faces were livid, and the movements of traffic grew uncertain and confused, as if those ponderous, lumbering 'busses, fleetly schooling taxicabs, and sedate town-cars found a certain difficulty in seeing their way. Voices near at hand rang with curious clearness, the ceaseless growl of Town was muted to a sullen purring like that of some great beast mutinously quiescent.

The club dining-room was already beginning to empty; and much to the relief of Rodney, who had armed himself with an evening paper against possible overtures of a social nature, not a soul he knew was present; so he settled down to read while satisfying the sharp hunger for which he had to thank a twenty-four hour fast.

For that matter, the newspaper was the first he had seen in thirty-six; but it was through no real desire to get up on the news again that he scanned column after column with meticulous interest, it was merely the normal lunacy of a man in love that led him to search the paper through and through for that name round which all his world revolved.

You never could be sure, she might have met with some accident or other . . .

The word Naples caught his eye in the cable news; and he read, with such wonder as one might know on seeing the name of a king of Faerie figuring in current history, a despatch that related of the death of one Aniello Ansiello, "the last great chieftain of the Camorra."

The Italian police, it appeared, stimulated to extraordinary efforts by the murder of four Carabinieri at the hands of a notorious Camorrista assassin, Tobia Basile, who had himself perished resisting arrest, had discovered the secret headquarters of the Camorra in an ancient and supposedly deserted palazzo, had thrown a cordon of

troops about it and arrested everybody within its walls—all, that is, but one who was found dead in an invalid chair, killed by poison self-administered, Aniello Ansiello, the Supreme Master of the Society in the heyday of its power, who had mysteriously disappeared and for nearly thirty years had been believed to be dead.

"It is believed," the despatch wound up, "that this marks the end of the Camorra as a social and political power in Naples, over which city it has exercised almost despotic rule for upwards of a hundred years."

Rodney put the paper aside with a silent prayer of thanksgiving.

That peril, seemingly, was laid. Save in the improbable event that the "Old One" had been merely playing with Francesca, and that advices betraying her were already on the way to, if not actually in the United States, she had nothing now to fear from the only man in the Camorra who, aside from her brother, had been a party to the secret of her impersonation.

And if Ritchey had not been too optimistic in his guarded assurances, or Rodney in interpreting them, tonight would write *Finis* to the American chapter of her foolhardy history as "Luigi Barocco."

For nothing (Rodney vowed, in his abstraction thumping the table with an emphasis which excited the amusement of hovering waiters) was more certain than that, once he found Francesca again, he would never give her a second opportunity to escape him, never leave her till he had re-established that dominion over her mind and emotions which had, last night, so nearly wrung from her the promise to forego her vengeance.

Toward this consummation extreme, even heroic measures were indicated; but contemplation of them left Rodney undismayed.

For if it was true that as a maiden errant Francesca was and must forever be free to follow the whims of her own sweet will, it was no less true that as his wife . . .

XXIX

THE storm held off, but the city knew no relief from the burden of its promise, and reading the handwriting in characters of fugitive flame upon the jetty walls of Heaven in the West, trembled and held its breath in expectation. And the threat vibrant in air surcharged with unspent energy rendered all humanity, in the mass and individually, astatic and distraught.

Certainly it did little to soothe the nervous restlessness that afflicted Rodney when, refreshed and fortified by his day-long sleep and an excellent dinner, he found himself with only hopes and fears to occupy his mind between nine o'clock and midnight.

He revisited his rooms, found there precisely what he had expected, that is to say nothing new, tried to settle down and wait in peace, like a sensible body would, but had his trouble for his pains; and after fifteen minutes of this snatched up hat and stick and took to the streets once more, hoping to win distraction at least in exercise.

For an hour or more he plunged blindly, at wild random, through the sullen night, downtown and up again, heedless whither he wandered, turning back at a point well below Washington Square only in obedience to some obscure admonition of the unconscious mind. Nor was it until he found himself at a standstill, with straw hat in one hand, the other dabbling a handkerchief over a dripping forehead, on a corner of Madison Avenue over across from that which for so many years had been dedicated to the business of Baroque Brothers, that he appreciated whither his subliminal drift had been leading him, what driving curiosity had been excited in him that

morning, by Ritchey's casual mention of the property, to look again upon the place where he first had viewed the face of fatality.

There was poor reward, however, in the desolate visage which the shop showed the street. The window had been repaired which Liborio had broken in his last moment of life, but naturally the firm name had not been restored to the new sheet of plate-glass, the card of a real-estate agent filled its place, and all the shades inside were drawn down to the sills.

The upper floors had always, Rodney knew, been let as small apartments; and dull lights burned now behind open windows on the second and fourth floors, though those on the third and fifth were dark.

For some minutes Rodney lingered, bareheaded, of two minds whether to go on uptown or let himself be influenced by an impulse such as the lovelorn know too well and turn aside for a closer look at the front of the house that adjoined the shop on the cross-town street. It had been really there that he had first met Francesca, not in the shop . . .

On the other hand it clearly seemed the part of prudence to go home, and that without delay; a drift of hot air was souging languidly eastward through the streets, the mutter of thunder over the Jersey hills was growing louder and more savage with each successive roll, there could be little doubt but that the storm was soon to break.

Then abruptly, as if decided by sheeted lightning which turned the western firmament into one vast canopy of flame, he put on his hat, crossed the avenue, and keeping to the opposite side of the street started to walk slowly past what had been the Barocco home.

At the same time the wind plucked up spirit and began to lift dust and lesser débris and send it scurrying in blinding clouds. Here and there blots of warmish water as big as dollars appeared as by magic upon bone-dry asphaltum. Footfarers caught at their hats and quickened

their steps. Those of means who had trusted too long to luck, ran for the avenues and signalled frantically at scampering taxis which, already chartered by foresighted folk, acknowledged all such appeals only by accelerating their pace. Rodney alone seemed to set no value on the menace of the storm, but maintained the same deliberate gait, gazing fixedly at the dark house over the way.

Possibly because it was on the market, its ground-floor doors and windows had not been boarded, like those of its neighbours whose occupants had forsaken Town for the Summer. Behind their grilles they were as blank holes of blackness. But shades were drawn at all windows on the upper floors, and the absence of any hint of artificial light seemed to indicate that the premises lacked even a caretaker—or else boasted one whose notion of taking care was to go to bed at an unusually early hour.

Or—could he be mistaken?—was that the flare of a match in the backwards of the entrance-hall, beyond the iron-barred glass of the front door?

Rodney stopped short; but a great cloud of dust blew between him and the house, when it passed rain began to fall in good earnest, and the darkness of the dwelling across the way was unrelieved.

Calling himself a fanciful idiot, he picked up his heels and made for Fifth Avenue, but was met half-way by a downpour of such severity that he was fain to take cover in the recessed doorway to a mercantile establishment.

Here he was protected in a measure, marooned between the locked doors behind him and the deluged street before, but hugely discontented and inclined to curse himself for a mooning fool. Anybody else would have had sense enough to hurry home while there was time . . .

A flash of lightning permitted consultation of his watch. It marked half after ten. There was comfort, at all events, in the knowledge that he was not due in his rooms, to answer the telephone or receive Ritchey's report in person, for another ninety minutes; long before which

time the storm, if it ran true to the form of New York's summer showers, should have spent its first fury—something he might count himself fortunate not to be obliged immediately to brave. For its first fury was uncommonly furious, and no mistake.

The air was grey with driven water, a veil now thick now thin, through which the buildings on the far side of the street were spectral shapes fading and wavering. The rattle and crash of thunder was almost continuous; when now and anon it subsided for a little the night was loud with the crepitation of a myriad brittle lances broken upon the pave. Lightning alternately flooded the world with blinding glares of ghastly white and played like a searching sword through the bellying arrasses of rain.

Rodney crouched back as far as he could to escape the backspatter, and lighted a cigarette. The flickering match turned his thoughts back to the phenomenon which he had thought to descry through the glass doors of the deserted house. But in all likelihood he had imagined that, or been deceived by the reflection from a match lighted in a window on his own side of the way. Anything was possible, of course . . . Even that Angelo, for reasons of his own, perhaps to hide away from Francesca or Ritchey, had sought refuge in his abandoned home . . . Or that Francesca, failing to find her brother in his accustomed haunts, was hunting him there!

Startled by the possibilities latent in these surmises, Rodney edged forward and peered out. A flare of lightning afforded a view of the Barocco house at an oblique angle. Darkness succeeded, thickened by the grey, shaking curtains. Had it been only over-eager fancy that made him think he saw a figure in the doorway of the Barocco house, entering or departing, he could not say which, so brief had been the glimpse?

If he had seen something of the sort, the chances were all that it was some storm-swept wight taking shelter, like himself.

But perhaps not . . .

Without premeditation Rodney found himself out in the rain again, pelting toward Madison Avenue and at the same time striking diagonally across the street.

In two breaths his clothing was drenched through and through, he could feel the very shirt on his back grow cold and wet to the skin.

Half-blinded, dazed and out of breath, he gained the sidewalk in front of the dwelling wherein his interest centered, paused long enough to satisfy himself there was no one skulking in the doorway, no light visible behind the glass, then held on. Idle to try the door if Angelo were hiding there, dangerous to boot: Rodney had another scheme in mind, one that had without recognition been formulating itself ever since he had been struck by the possibility that the house might not, after all, be as deserted as it seemed.

Once round the corner, he darted into the vestibule of the building whose ground floor was given over to the now vacant shop, and studied the names on a rank of brass-bound letter boxes. Then he pressed the button beneath the box numbered 2. A few seconds later the electric latch clicked and, pushing open the door, Rodney passed into the hallway and ran panting up the stairs.

A door stood open on the first landing, framing a young man who wore a dressing-gown, a pipe, and an expression of inhospitable indifference. Rodney greeted him by stopping and assuming a blank look.

"Mr. Miller?" he enquired.

The young man looked him dispassionately up and down, reckoned him a respectable person by the cut of his sodden clothing, at least no sneak-thief, removed the pipe from between his teeth long enough to articulate "Upstairs—two more flights," turned back into his apartment, and banged the door.

Rodney went on up, briskly on the second flight, cautiously on the third, stealthily along the fourth floor hall-

way and past the door to Mr. Miller's quarters, still more stealthily up to the fifth floor.

Here it was quite dark, but he struck matches and their guidance located an iron ladder leading up to the roof. The hatch that closed the trap was in place, but not hooked down (this he took for a favourable omen) and, pushing it back, he clambered out upon the roof.

It was blowing harder up there than it had been in the street, and the rainfall as well was, if anything, more savage. Also, it was pitch black, save when lightning rent the skies.

By its fitful play Rodney picked his way across to the roof of the Barocco house and located its hatchway.

Hope had not misled him: when he knelt and dug fingers under the edge of the hatch, it yielded readily. So much for the common carelessness of householders and domestics!

Carefully sliding the cover back, he bent over the opening.

A draught of stale air fanned up into his face, sickeningly hot.

No hint of human occupation in the blackness that yawned below, no glimmer of light, no sound . . .

Letting his feet down through the trap, Rodney fished around with them till they found iron rungs. These he descended till his head was below the coaming; and pausing to drag the hatch back into place, he climbed on down to the floor.

Only then did he stop to consider his status of a house-breaker, subject to being shot at sight.

XXX

RODNEY in those days accounted himself neither more or less heroic in spiritual stature than the next man or the next dozen one might meet. Years in France had well revised the conventional conceptions of courage and cowardice with which his education had duly equipped him for the adventure of life. He had learned that man is brave or fearful as the case may be—according to the time of day, the power of his passions, the stuff of his convictions, the strength of his digestion. He himself had not without honour in the minds and mouths of men come through that cruel ordeal of War—and now stood quaking in his boots because he knew that, having accomplished an act of burglary, he had put himself outside the law and at the mercy of the householder, one who, if he were at home, as Rodney believed him to be, would surely show no mercy.

Alone and unarmed in the stronghold of an enemy, who twice in the last twenty-four hours had attempted his life, Rodney was frankly and thoroughly frightened and repentant of the quixotic rashness with which he had accepted the challenge to his imagination offered by this ostensibly untenanted house.

Wholeheartily he wished himself well out of it.

Yet there was nothing definite to encourage misgivings. The house was dark and still—that was all. He could allege no good excuse for this unmanly distilling of dread from its darkness, horror from its hush.

But it was black enough in all conscience, there in the hallway of the upper floor. Intermittently the stricken heavens filled the glazed skylight with an eerie greenish-

violet glare, and revealed a row of doors, some open, some closed, the head of the stair-well, the balustrade round its black maw.

To this last he found his way and, gripping the hand-rail, leaned out and gazed down.

Nothing but darkness; silence but for the drumfire of rain on the roof . . .

Then again that ghastly illumination of the glass dome overhead—and Rodney started back with a hammering heart.

Was it fact or fancy, that he had seen, by that instantaneous flare, the pale oval of a face upturned and watchful at the bottom of the well, five flights below?

If so, whose? Angelo's, Francesca's, a care-taker's?

Could he possibly have made so much noise, cautiously as he had worked, lifting that hatch and replacing it after climbing in?

If so, his head and shoulders, jutting out beyond the balustrade, must have been clearly silhouetted against the skylight, to the watcher down below.

Tempted to withdraw incontinently, he put that thought aside. It might have been Francesca's face that he had seen—if he had seen anything . . . And while the possibility of her being in the house, alone, alarmed, remained a question, he could never go.

He waited for another flash, but with the top of his head projecting beyond the rail just far enough to let him use his eyes. When it came he saw . . . nothing.

Neither was any sound in the house audible above the clamour of the storm.

Delay grew as unendurable as it was unprofitable. In the end he had to take his courage and his life in his hands and brave the unknown . . .

With infinite caution, keeping close to the wall and back from the handrail, he forced himself down the stairs step by step, flight after flight, with many and long pauses to reconnoiter. And nothing happened, he heard and

saw nothing to give him pause. What he could determine, or guess at, of conditions in the house was merely what he had looked forward to, an emptiness swept and garnished. He judged that little if any of the furniture had been removed. The lightning, tempered by drawn window-shades, showed him rooms peopled with weird assemblages of shapes crouching, squat and monstrous, under dust-cloths. And he was gratefully aware that the carpet had not been taken up on the stairs or in the hallways.

But the farther he descended, the more near he drew to danger—if there were any; and going on the evidences of senses never more alert, he began to doubt if there were; that is, until about half-way down the flight to the drawing-room floor. Then he got the notion that he was being stalked from above rather than, as he had assumed, stalking whatever it was, if anything, that skulked below.

Something, he couldn't say what, seemed to warn him of a presence, an intelligence hostile and malignant, on the stairs behind him.

He stopped dead, and half-turned, in a shudder of apprehension, a shiver rippling down his spine, the breath catching in his throat, hairs lifting upon his scalp—as if he thought to see some hideous and inhuman face of terror leering at his shoulder, livid with corpse-light in the mirk.

But the darkness was impenetrable. And the vertex of the storm had passed, carrying with it the worst of the lightning; Rodney could no more depend upon its broken fire-play to guide him clear of gins and pitfalls.

Nevertheless, he *knew* that there was something there, on the steps behind him, something that hadn't been there when a moment since he had passed the spot where it now hung poised, something that watched and mocked him, following when he went on, stopping when he stopped; something that, worst of all, cut off retreat to the

roof and left him without choice but to go on down to his fate decreed.

In sudden panic, throwing caution to the winds, he started to run down to the landing. Three steps—and a cord stretched across the stairs caught his feet and threw him headlong.

He fell with a force that jarred every inch of him and drove the breath out of his lungs in a groaning blast. Momentarily half-stunned and helpless, he lay with limbs spasmodically a-twitch; and felt a heavy body drop upon his back, pinning him to the floor.

A voice cried out exultantly in Italian, his arms were jerked behind him with brutal force and caught together with cord above the elbows, his captor rose and turned him over, a dancing spotlight drew near and steadied to his face, he heard the accents of Angelo, irritable and contemptuous.

“The busy lawyer boy!”

The oleaginous voice of Mr. Croce replied—and shaken as he was, Rodney could almost see the accompanying flash of teeth.

“My haughty opponent. *Tck!*”—a cluck of impatience—“what a catch!”

XXXI

ANGELO replied with something grumbled indistinctly, by its ring of discontent an Italian malediction of every day. The beam of his torch winked out, blinding darkness fell, for some moments there was silence, no one spoke, no one moved—but Rodney vainly tested the strength of his bonds. Then a sigh, long and weary with disconsolation . . .

A blaze of lightning without thunder defined the semi-translucent rectangles of the drawing-room windows, and a ghostly glimmer penetrated to the hallway where, at the foot of the stairs, Rodney lay, affording him a fugitive impression of the two Italians standing over him—Angelo drooping against the balustrade in a posture of profound dejection.

Out of the darkness Croce's accents issued with a ring of mockery:

"Well, my friend! now you've got this gentleman where you've been wanting him so long, what are you going to do with him?"

Angelo's response was again unintelligible, a mutter of resentment. Another pause: Rodney became aware that he was recovering from the shock of his downfall, and discovered a curiosity, surpassing even that of Mr. Croce as indicated by his query, concerning the temper of Angelo toward himself. Why in Heaven's name was the fellow hesitating?

Of a sudden Angelo pronounced morosely: "Luck of the devil!"

"Meaning Mr. Manship's?" the polite voice of Croce enquired with interest.

"No—mine! These damnable delays, this storm from

hell, and then"—none too gently his foot made sure that Rodney hadn't moved—"this!"

"Easily disposed of."

"Think so?"

"We can't take him away," Croce cheerily pointed out, "we'd be fools to leave him here."

"Never that!"

"Then you know what to do."

"I don't. I think the fool bears a charmed life. I begin to be afraid. Luck's against me!"

"Tck! Always beefing about your luck. A lucky man is one who carves out his own luck with his own steel."

"That doesn't tell me how to silence . . ."

"Doesn't it?" Croce in civil surprise enquired. "Thought it did."

"If he had only died in his own rooms!" Angelo complained bitterly—"no one would ever have known for sure. But here—!"

"Precisely," Rodney put in pleasantly from the floor. "Difficult to hide my remains, you know; and Ritchey would scour the known world to get you. Besides, a shot might be overheard and complicate the problem of your escape. . . . Of course you understand, I offer these suggestions merely for what they may be worth, in a purely sporting spirit."

"Shut up!" Angelo snapped. "That is, unless you want me to gag you."

"The triangolo works in silence," Croce helpfully stated, "and silence falls where it has worked."

"You think of all the nice things, don't you?" Rodney observed. "And I'd been wondering where Mr. Baroque got his inspirations."

But there was none of this bravado in his heart, only incredulity. Impossible to believe that this matter-of-fact conversation could be concerned with his murder in cold blood . . .

"There's no other way out," Angelo wearily decided,

after a brief pause. "Pick him up, will you, and bring him into the library. We'll want a light."

"Why, 'we'?" Croce demanded in pained expostulation. "Why drag me in? This is your affair, my friend. I'm off to call a taxi. We've waited long enough, too long . . ."

"Go by all means—to the devil, if you like."

Angelo's voice lost volume with his receding footfalls. Croce bent over Rodney, wound a hand into his collar, and swung him awkwardly up on his feet.

"For God's sake!" Rodney protested. "You can't mean this, Mr. Croce!"

"That's the surprising part of it: we can't but we do. It's too bad, I know, Mr. Manship, but you brought it on yourself. . . . Now be nice—don't hang back and make me treat you rough: I don't owe you any courtesies, you know."

Holding Rodney's arms firmly pinioned, the man propelled him down the hall with a decision that brooked no opposition.

"If you'd only had sense enough to keep out of this . . . Not that I blame you: she really is a charming girl. . . . But sooner or later every man has to be taught to mind his own business. Sorry the lesson has got to be such a hard one, but you've left us no choice; you and Francesca between you have worked us into a corner we can only fight our way out of."

Croce thrust Rodney into the gloom of the library, and released him.

"I'm off," he advised Angelo. "Won't be five minutes; and you'll be ready when I come back, won't you?"

"All right."

"I'll shut the door here, and you might wait a few moments till I'm out of the house . . . Bless my heart! I *am* much too squeamish . . ."

The voice died out beyond the closing door. Rodney had brought up against a chair. Gripping its back with

the hands caught together behind him, he steadied himself and waited for the light Angelo had promised, waited while Fear closed numbing fingers round his heart, stole his breath away, and worked like hypnotism on his mind.

Belowstairs the front door gave a hollow crash. Somewhere nearby Angelo could be heard cursing Croce for a clumsy, incautious fool. Unreasonably he withheld the light.

Tried beyond his strength, Rodney called out "Baroque!" in a voice that quavered in spite of himself.

"Well?" Angelo tersely replied.

"In the name of God! come to your senses—"

"I have, long ago . . . It's your turn now."

Rodney tried to continue his appeal, but hearing something rustle in obscurity close at hand took it to mean that Angelo had changed his mind about the light or meant to do what was to be done first. He cried out incoherently in a strangled voice.

The lights blazed up, a cry from Angelo drowned Rodney's. They were not alone; at the wall, her hand on the switch, Francesca stood, in her dress of a man, confronting Angelo.

Apparently the latter had been searching for the switch; but at sight of his sister he had cringed back and now stood, in the semi-crouch of an animal at bay, with his back to the doorway, his features working in alarm, hatred and dismay. In his tremulous grasp the dread triangolo caught the light and shivered like a tongue of evil flame.

"You!" he spat, half choking—"you!"

He would have said more, but could not for his rage, and fainted with the knife as if to strike Francesca down; but she was not deceived, she stood her ground.

"Myself," she replied evenly. "I felt sure I'd find you here. Thank God I did—in time!"

The man dropped back a pace, lifted the knife, stared at it blankly, cast it from him as if afraid of it.

"How," he stammered—"how—?"

"How did I get in without your knowledge? Waited for thunder to drown the noise of the door, then crept up here while you two were tormenting poor Mr. Manship. Now I shall take him away with me."

She turned to go to Rodney, but Angelo flung between them.

"No!" he screamed, barring her way with arms whose hands resembled claws. "No, you won't take him away! D'you hear me? You won't! You may go—damn you! I've got to let *you* go—but he stays, he stays! It's my life or his."

Francesca made no immediate effort to press past him, but stood eyeing him steadily, her mouth twitching with disdain.

"What of it? You say it's his life or yours. But what is that to me?"

"You know—you know if he goes and talks, they'll get me—"

"And then—?"

"If they get me"—Angelo seemed to be fighting with all his might to speak with coherence—"you'll die, too. You don't want to forget that. We're twins. You can't outlive me, I can't outlive you. If you want to die, help that man escape—or try to—for I won't let him go while I live."

"You mean—"

"It's life against life. Before I let him go, we'll have it out here. Yes, you and I!"

"If that suits you best." Francesca shrugged. "But listen to me first: You are mistaken, Mr. Manship knows nothing, or as little as nothing, he couldn't betray you if he wanted to. That power rests with me alone."

Angelo gave a start of dismay.

"How is that, rests with you?" he quavered.

"It is I who know all your infamy, Angelo, the wickedness you've struggled so hard to hide. From the first

I suspected, today I have learned the whole truth at last. And you my brother!"

"Damn you!" the boy shrilled—"what do you know?"

He made as if to catch her by the shoulders and shake the truth out of her. She checked him with a look like a kick. He fell back, cowed, gibbering.

"I know everything. And because one mother bore us . . . No: because I love Mr. Manship—Angelo, I give you one last chance. If you go now, go quickly and lose no time, you may save yourself. If you delay—"

"Why should I go?" Angelo's spirit had one final flash of defiance. "Because you tell me to? Do you think I'm afraid of you?"

"I have sent the call to the Council. It will meet here in half an hour—in less. You have barely time to get away. When it assembles, I shall fulfil the vow I made with my hand upon the dead bosom of the father whom your treachery killed—I shall denounce you, my own brother, for *'nfamita*, and lay before the Council proofs it can't question. But till they come—you are free to go."

Francesca offered to brush Angelo aside, only to find that fear and fury had tried his self-control beyond its strength. In that moment the tension, grown too severe, snapped, Angelo became no more a rational being but a maniac.

With the inarticulate snarl of a maddened beast, he flung himself upon the girl, struck her in face and bosom, threw her back with such violence that she staggered, tripped, all but fell, saved herself only by catching hold of the desk. Then, while she strove to regain her balance, he tore for a moment frantically with fumbling fingers at the breast-pocket of his coat, worried something out, levelled it.

Recognizing the shimmer of blued steel in his shaking hand, Rodney without hesitation hurled himself bodily upon the boy. With his hands bound he could do no

more; bound or no, he could do no less. The pistol exploded as his shoulder struck Angelo full on his left chest, knocked him fairly off his feet, sent him spinning and catching at the air, to collide with a chair, throw it over, and fall across its legs.

The pistol flew out of his grasp, Rodney with a kick sent it skimming beneath the desk.

He saw Francesca with a hand pressed to her bosom, a look of perplexity dilating the dark eyes in a face of deathly pallor. But she gave no other sign, and without suspicion he turned to give all his attention to the problem of coping, handicapped as he was, with the madman who was already springing up from the floor and pulling himself together to fly at Rodney's throat.

Simultaneously the hall door was thrown open, Ritchey appeared upon the threshold, paused half a heartbeat to grasp the situation, then laying hold of Angelo threw him back into the arms of two other plainclothes men, and darted across the room to Francesca.

He was in time to catch her as, all at once, her eyes closed, her lips opened, the hand fell away from her breast, her knees gave.

A groan bubbled on Rodney's lips. He started forward, but found himself held back by a policeman in uniform who had come in on the heels of the plain-clothes men and who, seeing Rodney with his arms bound, hastened to set him free.

"Easy!" he counselled in a voice of rough sympathy. "Stand still, and I'll turn you loose in a jiffy, sir."

"Let me go," Rodney pleaded.

Ritchey looked up from the body which he had lowered gently to the floor.

"No, Mr. Manship," he insisted—"better stay where you are. It's too late . . ."

A scream of mortal terror interrupted him, and Angelo lunged forward madly, only to be jerked back by the detectives.

"Too late? What d'you mean? She isn't hurt!"

"No," Ritchey replied to him directly—"I guess you wouldn't say she's hurt, not now. It's worse than that."

"Not dead? Not dead!"

For all answer, Ritchey turned back the front of the man's coat which Francesca wore, exposing the bosom of a white shirt darkly and widely stained with blood.

Again Angelo strained to break away, but without effect.

"Not dead!" he shrieked. "Not dead!"

With a sad shake of his head, Ritchey drew a white handkerchief from the pocket of Francesca's coat, and with it reverently masked the sweetly immobile face upturned to the light.

Then hastily he rose and interrupted Rodney as the latter stumbled, stricken, toward the body of his love.

"No, Mr. Manship," he insisted kindly. "It's too late, you can't do nothin' now. Wait a minute—watch!"

He wound a firm arm round Rodney's shoulders and swung him round to face Angelo.

"Steady!" he begged in a hoarse whisper. "Take it easy, Mr. Manship, and—*get this!*"

Without wonder, without comprehension, crushed by that first, cruel shock of grief, Rodney saw that Angelo had ceased to struggle, had fallen into a phase of strangely rigid passivity in the hands of the other detectives.

His head lowered and thrust forward, mouth agape, eyes so wide in their downcast stare that a finger's-breadth of white showed above their dark irides, he stood gazing at the still form of his twin sister, then with a convulsive start shrank back and fearfully consulted Ritchey with a glance.

"For the love of God!" he stammered—"tell me she isn't—!"

"You fired the shot that killed her," Ritchey brutally cut him short. "If you want to make anybody believe

you didn't go to do it, save your lies for the jury that'll send you to the Chair for murder in the first degree."

Angelo replied only in a husky monosyllable freighted with the fright that was freezing his heart:

"Dead!"

With a sharp, spasmodic movement he broke the hold of the plain-clothes men, took one uncertain step toward the body of his sister, essayed another but faltered, swaying, threw out his hands in the gesture of a man groping blindly in the dark, and without a moan, without more struggle, collapsed as if stricken down by an invisible hand.

Ritchey dropped to his knees, heaved the boy over till he lay with face to the light, tore open his shirt, laid a hand above his heart.

A curious smile darkened his plain countenance of a commonplace man.

Then suddenly he swung upon his subordinates with indignant barks:

"Here, you! run—find a doctor, quick—telephone for an ambulance! Don't stand there like a pack of pop-eyed saps! Get a move on you—it's life or death!"

The detectives fell back in dismay, hesitated and, turning with one accord, disappeared in haste.

Ritchey nodded impatiently to the uniformed policeman.

"Here, you! lend us a hand, and be quick. Got to get this stiff out of sight before the girl comes to."

"What!" Rodney cried—"what did you say? She isn't dead?"

Ritchey grinned broadly.

"Not so's you'd notice it—plugged through the shoulder and fainted from pain and loss of blood, that's all."

"But—you said—!"

"I wanted to see what he'd do, what'd happen when he thought he'd killed her. Member tellin' me how these two thought they had to die at the same time, account

their bein' twins? Well! this one"—he indicated the body of Angelo with a jerk of his head—"believed it good and hard, all right—so hard it killed him. Or I guess you might say he killed himself with fear. He was so sure he had to die, he did. But she . . ."

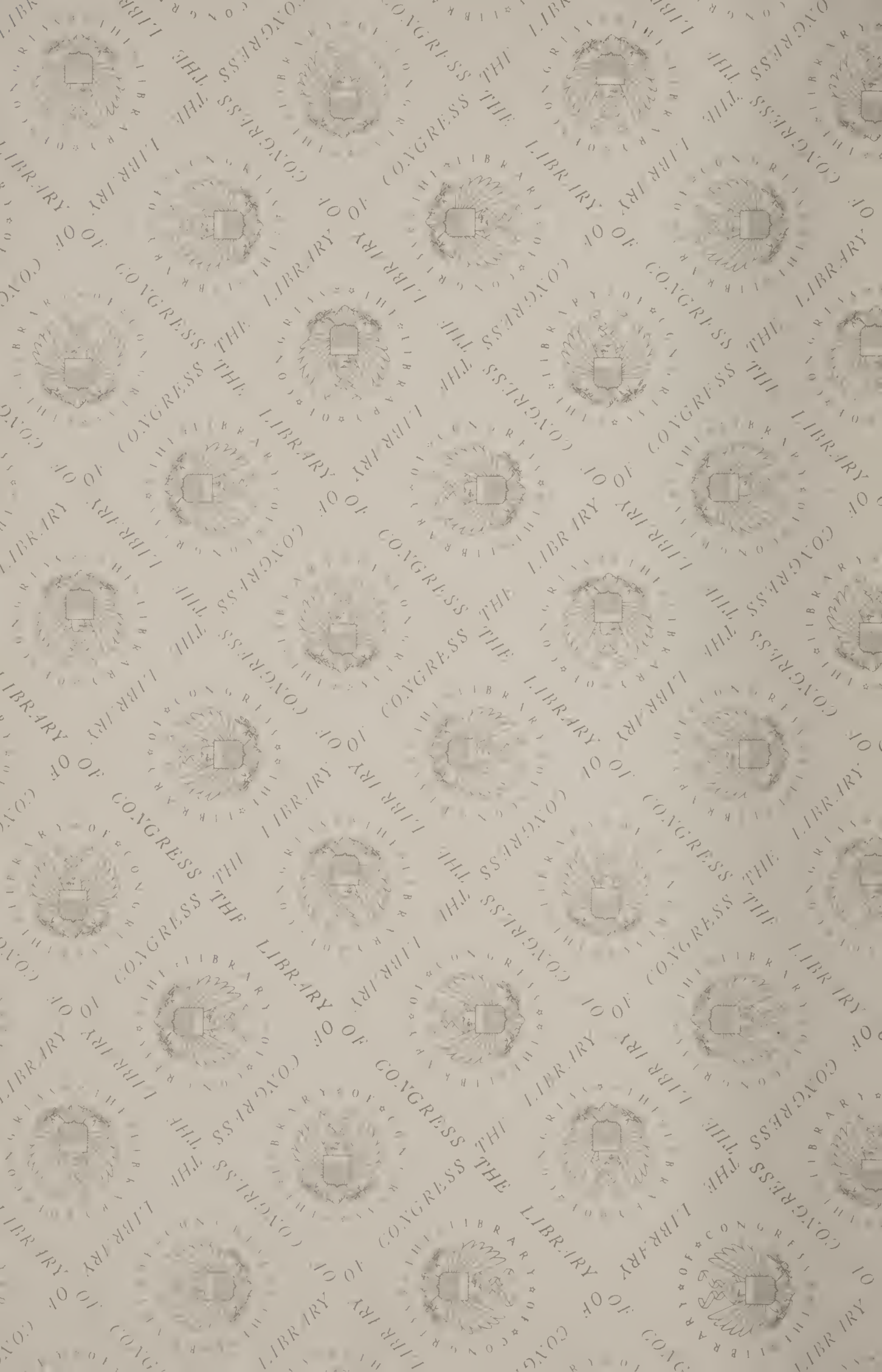
He got up, taking the shoulders of Angelo as the policeman lifted his feet, to carry him out of the room.

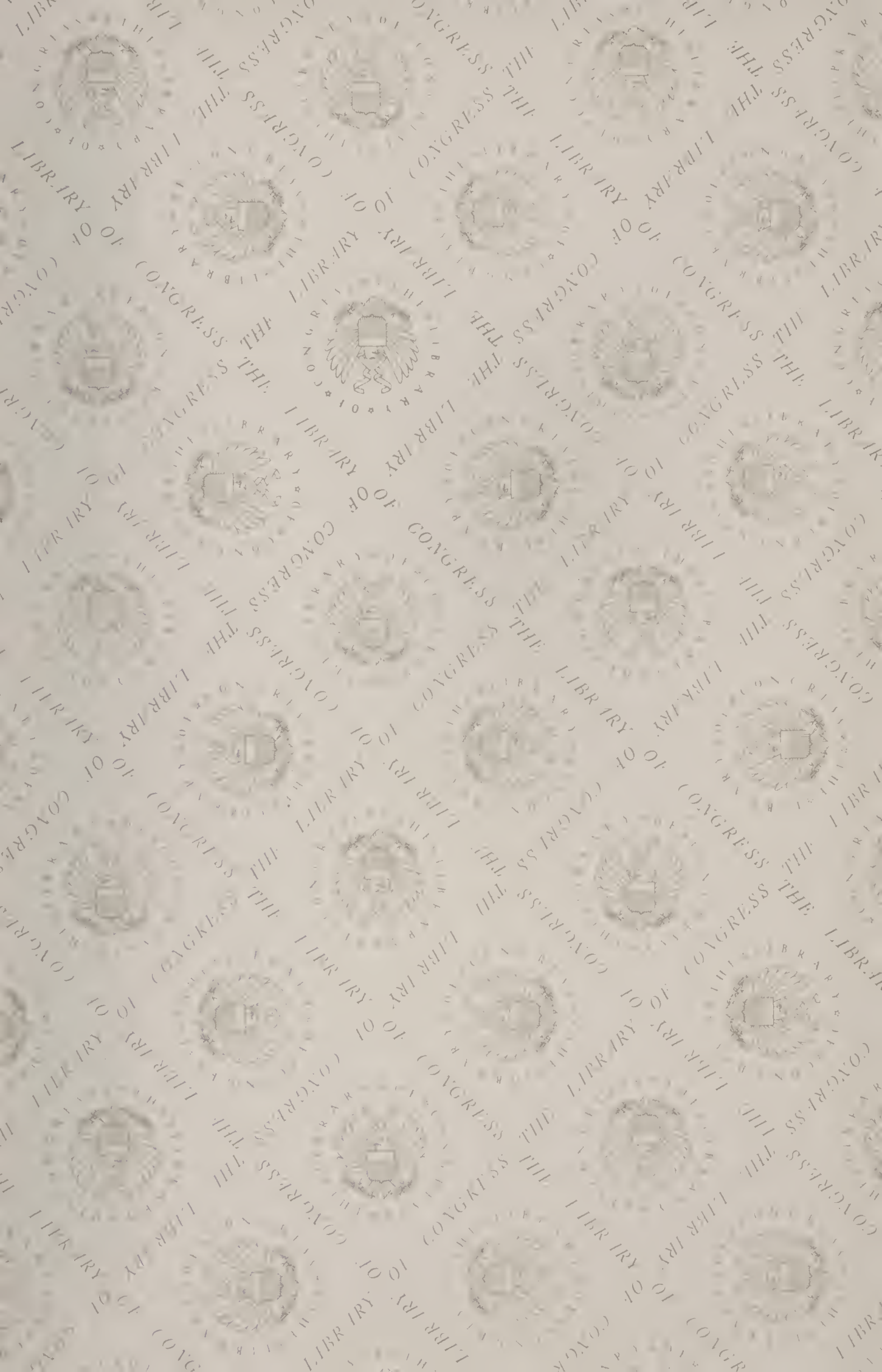
"Look for yourself, if you don't believe me. Don't let on to her, when she comes to, her brother's dead; just tell her he's under arrest. So long's she don't find out the truth too soon and scare herself to death, the same as him, she'll live to see her great grand-children—hers and yours!"

Alone with his beloved, Rodney lifted the handkerchief and bent solicitously over the face of fatality.

The breath of parted lips fanned softly the cheek he lowered to them. He could see pulses beating in the sweet hollows of that round young throat. And as he watched the lashes stirred, the eyes unveiled, she saw him, knew him, and smiling faintly murmured his name.

THE END





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